

**Young Man, This is the Reality of, and How you Resolve  
Frustration with Life under the Sun:  
Reconciling God's Sovereignty and your Mortality**

*A Study of Ecclesiastes*  
**OUTLINE**

**I. Life under the sun is the ultimate frustration Eccl. 1:1-2**

**A. God has decreed a cycle of futility under the sun: the conclusions of Solomon which led to his theme of frustration 1:3-11**

**B. All men occupy themselves under the sun, and Solomon has occupied himself with the pursuit of ultimate meaning 1:12-13**

**II. One should enjoy the good things from the fruit of his toil as he submits to Providence 1:14-6:12:**

**A. God's decree is unchangeable 1:14-15:**

**B. Man should joyfully occupy himself under the sun, while accepting his finiteness, and while keeping the following precepts in mind: 1:16-6:12**

**1. The more wisdom a man possesses; the more grief he has 1:16-18**

**2. Gaiety and a pleasurable life have no ultimate end 2:1-3**

**3. Accomplishing greatness is without ultimate end 2:4-11**

**4. Wisdom is better than folly in this life 2:12-16**

**5. Death frustrates a man's work 2:17-23**

**6. Resolve 1: Enjoy the pleasures of your life for they are a gift from God 2:24-26**

**Excursus 1: Futility and the Hope of Glory: Text: 1 Cor. 15:42-58; Rom. 8:18-30**

**7. God has decreed a time for all works under the sun 3:1-8**

**8. Man knows eternity, but not fully, and this is frustrating 3:9-11**

**9. Resolve 2: Every man should enjoy the life God has given him 3:12-13**

**10. God decrees and governs so that men may fear his unchangeable decree 3:14-15**

**11. God's righteous judgement comes at His appointed time 3:16-17**

**12. Under the sun, man dies just as the beast 3:18-21**

**13. Resolve 3: Rejoice in your works, they are your portion from God 3:22**

**Excursus 2: The death of death in the death of Christ and the abundant life in Christ**

**14. Never being born has advantage over an oppressive existence 4:1-3**

**15. Contentment is better than frustration, envy, and idleness 4:4-6**

**16. The lonely sinner's occupation is especially futile 4:7-8**

**17. Companionship has great advantage over being alone 4:9-12**

**18. Great popularity is fleeting at best 4:13-16**

**19. Fear God and speak wisely before Him at all times 5:1-7 (English)**

**20. Oppressive and covetous governments are fleeting 5:8-9 (English)**

**21. Profit is ultimately profitless: it is either lost or left 5:10-17 (English)**

- 22. Resolve/Well-driven Nail 4: It is the gift of God to eat, drink, and enjoy the fruit of your works 5:18-20 (English)
- 23. God gives the power to enjoy the fruits of our toil 6:1-6
- 24. But, you will not escape the frustration to which God has subjected all creation 6:7-12

**III. The fact that wise men die as fools notwithstanding, a wise man will enjoy a better life than will a fool 7:1-11:6**

**A. Wisdom is beneficial: 7:1-14**

- 1. To contemplate the parameters of life 7:1-10
- 2. To manage wealth 7:11-12
- 3. To understand that God works prosperity and adversity 7:13-14

**B. However, it is enough that man should possess God's wisdom and that he not pursue being as wise as God Himself 7:15-8:1**

- 1. Pursue that righteousness and wisdom that God has revealed and has required 7:15-22
- 2. Understanding God's universal scheme is too profound for man 7:23-8:1

**C. The wise man understands that the Most High God rules over time and judgment under the sun 8:2-9:12**

- 1. Just as the decree of the king, God's decree is unchangeable 8:2-9
- 2. All men, both the righteous and the wicked, will be judged by God, whether in this life or in the next 8:10-14
- 3. Resolve 5: Enjoy your days of God-given life 8:15
- 4. Again, man cannot know God's entire scheme being worked out in Providence 8:16-17
- 5. God has ordained that death comes to all 9:1-3
- 6. Resolve 6: The living have a hope to glorify God and to enjoy Him in this life 9:4-10
- 7. One will never know when his life will end 9:11-12

**D. Recapitulation of the benefits and the frustrations of wisdom 9:13-11:6**

*A wise man understands that:*

- 1. Wisdom, although belittled and forgotten, is greater than might 9:13-18**
- 2. A moment of folly ruins a lifetime of wisdom 10:1**
- 3. Fools are clearly manifested as fools 10:2-3**
- 4. One must remain calm in the midst of the unexpected 10:4-7**
- 5. Wisdom, courage, and timing bring success 10:8-11**
- 6. Fools speak presumptuously regarding things they know nothing about 10:12-15**
- 7. The blessed nation has as its rulers, the wise 10:16-17**
- 8. Diligence, man's prized possession, makes one rich without sorrow 10:18-19**
- 9. Wisdom causes one to be slow to speak 10:20**
- 10. Diversification reduces risk and leads to long-run success 11:1-6**

**IV. Conclusion and Resolve 7: Fear God and keep His commands early in life and throughout life 11:7-12:14**

- A. Enjoy your youth 11:7-10**
- B. Enjoy life before you die 12:1-7**
- C. Man's fear of and obedience to God is what he can know to do to resolve the frustration regarding God's Sovereignty and his own mortality 12:8-14**

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*A Study of Ecclesiastes*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Now is the time to study Ecclesiastes.

“Frustration of Frustrations, says Qohelet, frustration of frustrations, all is frustrating.” The preacher, or as it is written in the Hebrew, “Qohelet,” says all is frustrating—creation, wisdom, and life under the sun in general. In the Hebrew language, these words are structured for emphasis. “The most frustrating of all that could be frustrating.”

### **Frustration in Redemptive History**

Before starting an exposition of Eccl., Romans 8:18-20 helps us to interpret its theme and context. *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to **futility (frustration)**, [the same word used to translate the Hebrew: frustration] not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*

This passage enlightens us regarding redemptive history. We see, first, creation, second, the fall of man and subsequently that of creation, third, futility or the frustration to which God subjected the creation, fourth, the hope of both men and creation for deliverance from futility unto glory, and fifth, we see glory itself.

This word futility (mataiotes) (ματαιοτης) to which creation was subjected by God means folly, futility, vanity. It means that that which is futile—is empty—with regard to results. It's empty. It's vain. It is that which fails to achieve the results for which it was designed, owing to sin. Furthermore, mataiotes has the opposite meaning from the word, “teleios,” which means, “end.” So, mataiotes is opposite of that which has an end, a goal, an objective. Therefore mataiotes is equal to futility, purposelessness, without end, vain.

Regarding this word, the Greek Tragedians would say to their readers, “Is there finally any sphere [that] escapes the verdict of mataiotes—futility. All earthly being is smoke; ...only the gods abide.” Morris, in his commentary on The Epistle To the Romans, says that “the stern and irrefutable vanitas vanitatum (vanity of vanities) ends the futile struggle which living man in his desire for life, wages against his own insight into vanity (futility)...it points him to God with whom is no mataiotes. This is why the Book of Eccl

is a great tool for ministering the gospel. Man must anchor himself to God lest he drift in futility and die in his sins.

### **Frustration: Hebrew and Greek Philology:**

It is interesting and very important to note that “mataiotes,” is the Greek word found in the Septuagint used to translate the Hebrew word, hebel, in Ecclesiastes—the same word which the King James version of the Bible translates as vanity. Benjamin Shaw in his paper, “Why Ecclesiastes?,” has noted that the KJV translators borrowed the rendering of Coverdale in his 1535 translation of Ecclesiastes. Shaw continues his analysis by stating that, hebel, is a word that describes that which is evanescent, ephemeral, fleeting, [transitory, short-lived] or unsubstantial. The word is applied to idols (Jer. 10:15, to the quality and character of life (Ps. 39:5-6: man at his best is a vapor), and to sources of help that prove unhelpful (Lam. 4:17: the Jews watched for a nation that could not help them). What all the uses of the term have in common is that that which is “hebel” is so because it frustrates. Therefore, we should translate Eccl 1:2 as, “Frustration of frustration, all is frustrating.”

One should note that Adam and Eve’s second born child’s name was Hebel, or Abel. This is the same Hebrew word that is translated literally as “breath,” or “nothing.” This was an appropriate name for one of their sons since the ground was now cursed, toil was the normal course of occupation, and death was the end of a life of toil among the thorns and thistles. Adam and Eve knew the frustration and pointlessness of the post-Eden world, and, perhaps, named their child accordingly. The child himself would be the first to die a meaningless death. The early, sudden, and unexpected death of the righteous at the hand of the wicked. What frustration! That’s what’s in his name—Abel.

### **Frustration, yet Hope:**

Again, Rom. 8:20 reveals that God subjected the created world to frustration in hope. Morris said that the God of hope (Rom. 15:13) subjected the world to this state so that the world may know that the cosmic fall is not the last word; the last word is with hope. One must understand this principle of hope if one is to understand the place that Ecclesiastes takes in Redemptive History.

### **The Sense of Ecclesiastes:**

Regarding the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole, some say that it is a pessimistic book that leads one to believe that life without God in the world is vanity. Others suggest that the author, Qohelet, is deistic, pessimistic, and unorthodox, and that another later writer had to edit, or clean-up, the book (by adding a few pious phrases here and there) to make it respectable and receivable. Neither of these thoughts is sufficient. Harrison writes that Qohelet’s “basic proposition of wisdom, therefore, is that life in its manifold aspects is entirely devoid of meaning without God. Consequently, this exposition of ways and means for achieving the greatest degree of success in mortal life can hardly be said to be pessimistic, either Buddhist or modern existentialist pessimism. Qohelet was merely

presenting a sober—indeed critical—appraisal of life, and against the background of traditional Hebrew faith he pronounced upon the ultimate validity of varying facets of human existence in the light of experience.”

Harrison concludes, “While his approach was intensely realistic, it proceeded from the premise that God, rather than man, was the ultimate standard by which all motives and forms of behavior in human society must be interpreted. This laudable standpoint is clearly significant for ages other than that in which the author himself lived, for it points to the true nature of the *summum bonum*. If God is the source and end of all values, the world and its phenomena can only be regarded as His creation, and a life lived under God will seek to use and enjoy the manifold aspects of human existence to the greater glory of the Creator. In such an approach alone resides true wisdom, since it is not given to man to know the metaphysical subtleties of the divine mind.”

*How does one understand a divinely inspired book in which its author says that toil, the world, political power, large families, and long life is meaningless, or frustrating? Furthermore, what place does a book have in redemptive history that says that wisdom has only limited, relative significance in comparison to folly? Ben Shaw says that the position Eccl. holds in the canon can be best explained by understanding three phrases which are repeated throughout the book: “vanity of vanities,” “under the sun,” and “nothing better than.”*

**Vanity of Vanities**, or as we learned earlier, frustration of frustrations begins this book. This phrase appears 38 times in the book. As Shaw says, “People daily get what they think they wanted, only to find out that they are not satisfied.” People want too much out of life. They don’t realize that that for which they look is usually unattainable. The author, Qohelet, reminds us that life is frustrating. His comments prove this point in many different ways. Job 7:16 teaches that the brevity and uncertainty of life is vanity—a time of strength spent for nothing.

The second phrase, **“under the sun,”** reveals that the frustrating life is life, under the sun.” The life that the author finds frustrating is not eternal life, but life on earth, life in a fallen world—a world that has been subjected by God to futility. That is precisely the point that Paul makes in Rom. 8:20. God has intentionally subjected life to frustration, to teach us that our hope is not in this life, and that our hope does not come from this life, but comes instead from God Himself. The hope from God is the hope of glory—the hope that is derived, as any New Testament believer would know, from the knowledge that Christ is in us—a hope of being glorified (Col. 1:16). Qohelet knew that even those who are in covenant with God would experience frustration under the sun, yes, the most frustrating experience of all frustrations, yet he writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Eccl 3:11 that God has placed eternity in the hearts of men. Gleason Archer says that Qohelet wants to convince men of the uselessness of any world view which does not rise above the horizon of man himself. God places eternity in the hearts of men; He places a knowledge of Himself in mankind, yet, God doesn’t permit man to find out the end of His ways—this is frustrating. Unlike the thinking of the Classical Greeks, the Renaissance writers and thinkers, and the liberals of today, Shaw declares, “man is not

the measure of all things, nor is this life all that there is. God himself is the standard and the goal, and he has arranged life in this world in such a way that the attentive are constantly reminded of it.”

The third phrase is, according to Tremper Longman III in his Eccl. from the NICOT series, a “better than proverb.” We should note the phrase, “**nothing better than,**” throughout the book. In our lives of frustration under the sun, yes, for Christians and non-Christians, there are some things that are better than other things. Eccl 2:24 states, “There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God.” These “better than proverbs” reveal that not all of life is frustrating all the time. “Instead, according to Shaw, along with the frustrations of life, God gives us times of joy and pleasure, and we are to receive those as they are intended, to direct us thankfully to God, who provides for us and sustains us throughout life.” Wise men and fools die alike. Sometimes the wise man suffers adversity and goes unnoticed while the foolish man is exalted and given riches, and both of these by the decree of God for His glory. God has an unknowable scheme. Yet, Qohelet teaches that it is better under the sun to be a wise man than to be a fool. We also note that in Eccl 11:9 and in Eccl 12:13-14 that all men must endure frustration and walk in righteousness (e.g., fearing God and keeping His commandments Eccl. 12) because God holds all men accountable for their works.

### **Scope of Ecclesiastes:**

So, we see that Ecclesiastes is a book that has as its scope the ultimate frustration—life under the sun. This life, although frustrating, has its pleasures, which must be enjoyed under the watchful eye of God. Qohelet, knowing of the eternity beyond this life from his father David in Ps. 16:10, and from God’s working eternity into his heart, limits his discussion to how one should handle life under the sun in light of God’s sovereignty. This is not a book that deals directly with sin, the resurrection, or glory for that matter. It assumes this knowledge will reside in the reader. Therefore, we need not be concerned that Eccl. does not present a full-orbed systematic theology. It wasn’t meant to. But, Eccl. does teach us how to think about and how to live life, and how to cope with the frustrations of life, under the sun. Eccl. teaches young men about their mortality and about God’s sovereignty.

### **Ecclesiastes? What does the word mean?**

Ecclesiastes begins with, “Words of Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Qohelet is from the Hebrew word, “Qohal,” meaning a congregational gathering. The word appears only 7x in Eccl. and nowhere else in the Bible. There is also another Hebrew word for assembly, which we’ll discuss at another time. Qohal in the Greek is “ecclesia,”—the same word used for a church assembly. Qohelet is then thought of, according to Gleason Archer, as a gatherer of the people for the purpose of imparting instruction. Furthermore, Harris notes that Qohelet is a description of the writer possibly meaning one who causes the assembly to assemble. He also notes that Jerome in the Latin Vulgate renders Qohelet as *concionatur* (speaker before an assembly), which

translates as *the Preacher*. The Hebrews have always considered Eccl. as one of the Writings (Law, Prophets, and the Writings), which include Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Eccl., and Esther. Hendrikson says that Eccl. was read during the Feast of Tabernacles because the theme of the Feast of Tabernacles was that of hardship and faith during the time of Israel's desert sojourning. The writer of Eccl., Qohelet, could possibly be a title like, "Your Honor," or "Your Majesty." He would be a citizen of such respectability that he is entitled to gather an assembly of the people and address them. Qohelet translated into Latin is Ecclesiastes. This has been the title of the book since Jerome's 4<sup>th</sup> century Vulgate.

**Who was Qohelet? Why, it was no other than Solomon, however, many others have other opinions.**

The reason we believe Qohelet was Solomon is due to the internal evidence of Eccl. as it relates to what we know of Solomon in the rest of the Bible and in Jewish tradition.

- Ecclesiastes says that the writer is the son of David. Solomon is the immediate son of David. Solomon was king over Jerusalem and all of Israel. We see his life revealed in 1 Ki. 3-11.
- Solomon was unsurpassed in wisdom (1 Ki. 3:12-13; Eccl 1:16, 2:9, 12:9-14), number of servants (Eccl. 2:7), and wealth (Eccl. 2:4-9). Qohelet claims that he was wiser than any who preceded him. Those who preceded Qohelet could have been elders and judges and not just David and Saul the kings. Solomon bears the rank, wisdom, and age (most say he wrote Song of Songs in his youth, Proverbs in his middle age, and Eccl. in his old age) to assemble and to speak authoritatively. After all, multitudes of rulers came from all over the world to hear his wisdom (e.g., the Queen of Sheba in 1 Ki. 10).
- Solomon's conclusions in Eccl. are confirmed after his passing (e.g., futility of building a large and beautiful empire only to be ripped apart by his own sin and the sin of his son). Jewish tradition says that Solomon wrote it and for this reason it was included in the Hebrew canon and, because it testified of itself as being the Word of God, the Protestant New Testament canon as well.

Some say that Solomon didn't write Eccl. For example, Luther repudiated Solomonic authorship. Other theologians say that someone wrote Eccl. who took on Solomon's persona. Another tradition says (Babha, Bathra) Hezekiah wrote it, but elsewhere in these writings Solomon is assumed to have written it. Some say that Eccl. itself doesn't substantiate Solomon's authorship.

- This opinion is supported, for example, by Qohelet's seemingly negative view of rulers (4:13; 7:19; 8:2-4; 10:4-7; 17, 20); however, this was not a negative view, but a sober and philosophical view of the ministry and works of a king under the sun. Also, why Qohelet vs. Solomon.
- If Solomon were the writer, it seems that he would have used his name; but not, perhaps, if he were speaking as a philosopher king over Israel.



- Qohelet also says that he was wiser than *all* who ruled before him. If Qohelet were Solomon, then only Saul and David would have ruled before him, unless, of course, we include elders and rulers in Israel.
- Also, Eccl. 4:3 seems to be compassionate on the oppressed. If there were oppression in Israel, as recorded in Eccl. 4:3, then Solomon could have stopped it. In fact, the Scriptures seem to believe that Solomon himself was an oppressor (1 Ki. 12:4).
- Some have rightly noted that there are Aramaisms in the text of Eccl., but that doesn't mean that Solomon didn't write it. He knew of all languages.
- In addition, some say that given Eccl. 1:12, Qohelet was no longer king when he wrote. To answer this issue, Solomon could have framed his writing in an autobiographical form, not uncommon to the Middle Eastern autobiographies of that day. Also, if Solomon were the writer, he would have still been king at the time of the writing due to the fact that he was king until he died. It should be noted, however, that Solomon could have spoken as a philosopher and not from the royal perspective.
- Finally, some writers have said that Qohelet writes during a time of despondency and not one of prosperity, the characteristic of the time of Solomon. Solomon, however, could have spoken as the philosopher of Israel. In view of that, none of these proposed refutations to a Solomonic authorship overcome the facts that lead to Solomon, the wisest man that had lived to that time, as fitting the definition of Qohelet. With this, Jewish tradition agrees.

1 Ki. 3:12 records that Solomon was given, by virtue of his own request to God, a wise and discerning heart, "so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be." He was warned by Yahweh to walk in all the ways of David his father. David was a man after God's own heart. He obeyed God's commandments.

Solomon received wisdom from God, and, during his reign, he experienced social peace and prosperity. **Although Solomon had this peace and prosperity, it should be noted that there was an undertow of impending peril.** The New Geneva Study Bible states that the growth and extension of Israel's borders under Solomon's leadership required extensive military expenditures. Coupled with this were ambitious building and commercial projects throughout his expanding kingdom. As a result, Solomon faced an urgent need for ever-increasing revenues. To address this need, Solomon divided Israel into 12 districts and appointed governors over each district. These governors were responsible for levying and collecting taxes to provide for the needs of Jerusalem and the royal palace. The increasingly heavy taxes upon Israel created major dissension because the region of Judah was exempted from these burdensome taxes. Furthermore, the divisions of the districts violated the old tribal boundaries.

That's not the only impending problem, for Solomon was violating God's holy law regarding kings as recorded in Deut 17:14-20. Kings were to come from the covenant people and were not to multiply horses for themselves, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses. Kings were not to multiply wives for themselves lest those wives turn the kings' hearts away from Yahweh. Kings were also not to greatly multiply silver and gold for themselves. As we know, the love of money is the root of all evil. Kings were also to write a copy of the Law in a book so that the king should fear Yahweh

and obey Him all of his days for his sake and for his children's sake. If Solomon were to obey, then Yahweh would establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever, but if Solomon were to disobey, then Yahweh would cast Israel out of His sight.

Reading 1 Ki. 4-10, we see that **Solomon indeed multiplied gold, silver, and horses**—four thousand stalls for them at three per stall equals 12,000 horses, about which tradition says that he had young riders with beautiful clothing and gold dust in their hair riding them. Although this was probably a glorious scene and a blessing from Yahweh due to Solomon's request for wisdom, it all did seem to place quite a financial burden on the people.

Most disturbing of all was **Solomon's sin** of multiplying foreign wives. He sinfully took these wives from among the Canaanites (he married Moabitish, Hittitish, and Ammonitish women) and from among the Sidonians. He also married the daughter of Pharaoh whom the writer of 1 Kings 11 separates from the other foreign women. No doubt he married these women for diplomatic reasons to acquire peace and prosperity for his kingdom—Israel. We read in 1 Ki. 11 that he had 700 wives (princesses—women of the first rank), and 300 concubines (wives of an inferior rank) (round numbers here). Song of Songs 6:8 records 60 queens and 80 concubines at one time in the court. Solomon probably collected these wives throughout his reign and not all at once. When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away from wholly following Yahweh and toward following foreign gods. Although he built altars to the foreign deities of his foreign wives (2 Ki. 23:13), the writer of Kings does not accuse him of offering sacrifice to the deities. As a result, the Lord chastened Solomon by stating that his son's kingdom shall not be established. More specifically, Solomon's son Rehoboam would receive one tribe out of twelve, Judah, over which to rule. Yahweh also raised up adversaries against Solomon during his latter years. So, although we have no recorded revelation that Solomon either did or did not repent of his sins, we do note in 1 Ki. 11:41-43 that he rested with his fathers at the end of his life and was buried in the City of David. It is interesting to note that 1 Chron 1-10 says nothing of Solomon's sin, only his wisdom and accomplishments.

Solomon began to rule at around age 20 and died, after a 40 year reign over Israel, at about age 60. His father, David's, sins were women and then murder. Solomon's sins were women, pagan women, and then idolatry. David repented as recorded in Psalm 51, and, perhaps, Solomon's repentance is proven by his writing Ecclesiastes—All was vanity except fearing God and keeping His commandments.

### **Authorship Analysis:**

Back to authorship, I believe that the evidence is irrefutable that given Solomon's wisdom, and subsequent wealth, servants, achievements, fear of God, sin before God, length of life, experience within life, and his writings (i.e., Proverbs), only Solomon could have been the authoritative assembler of and preacher to the people known as Qohelet. And if this is true, then Ecclesiastes would have been written around the tenth century B.C.(ca. 970-930 BC was his reign) Note: NGSB says that Solomon may have

been around 20 yrs old when he ascended the throne. Some say the language proves that Ecclesiastes was written after the exile around the sixth century BC; however, there is no substantial argument that refutes Solomonic authorship. In fact, as long as the canon has existed, Eccl. has been included in it due to the assumption that Solomon wrote it. Rankin states that Solomon speaks in Eccl. as the ideal, authoritative exponent of wisdom—not unlike that which he expounded before the Queen of Sheba.

***What kind of a philosopher was Qohelet? To whom did Qohelet write? What was the theology of Solomon when he wrote this book in his latter years? What is the overall theme of the book?***

### **Solomon the Philosopher:**

Solomon was not a forerunner of Deism for he believed that man was held accountable before God for every thought, word, and deed. Qohelet writes about life under the sun as if God were involved with man's life and not distant and unconcerned.

Qohelet was **not an Epicurean**, whose philosophy of life would be to eat, to drink, and to be merry as an end. The Epicurean (Epicureus-342-270 BC) pursues a life of pleasure, which is regulated by “morality,” temperance, serenity, and cultural development. Some have mistakenly interpreted Eccl. 7:16-17 as being an Epicurean passage. Epicureans sought to find pleasure, yet they wanted to avoid extremes. Qohelet says, on the other hand, that the whole of man is to fear God and to keep His commandments; this is not Epicurean. Although Solomon had experienced all, this is not to be interpreted that he sought to fulfill sinful lusts to the full. Because Solomon spoke of eating, drinking, and merry-making as a way to enjoy the life given by God, the strict Jewish School of Shammai thought the book to be obnoxious. For example, Num. 15:39 was seen as inconsistent with Eccl. 11:9. This school sought to get rid of Eccl. even though it began with the Torah and ended with it. The looser School of Hillel found the book profitable. Keil and Delitzsch have noted that the “Council of Jamnia” (ca. AD 90) decided in favor of the canonicity of Eccl. regardless of the opinions of the School of Shammai.

Qohelet was **not a Stoic** (Stoic Poikele = painted porch). Those who held to the philosophy of “Follow Nature” would speak their philosophies from the Painted Porch in Athens and were, in turn, called Stoics for short. They looked to nature, fallen nature, to determine a system of philosophy by which to live. Stoics were indifferent, whether real or pretended, to pleasure or pain. Eccl. 9:7-8 is not a Stoic passage.

The author is **not Agnostic**—one who says that one cannot prove or disprove God's existence. The canonicity of Eccl. was often challenged based upon this accusation. Qohelet feared and believed in the One True God. It is my opinion that Eccl. is the record of Solomon's repentance toward God for his sins.

Qohelet was **not a Skeptic**—the philosophical doctrine that teaches that the truth of all knowledge must always be in question and that inquiry must be accomplished with a process of doubting. Skeptics denied the possibility of real knowledge of any kind.

Israel's skeptics, in particular, denied God's goodness and saw men and women as powerless to acquire essential truths. Solomon in Eccl. recognized the goodness of God and taught men to enjoy themselves during their brief existence. Eccl. 7:23-24 is not a justification for skepticism. Solomon knows that one cannot know God's entire scheme of things; therefore, man's knowledge is derivative from God's and is not comprehensive.

Finally, Qohelet was **not a Cynic** (Cynic means dog, or dog-like). Cynics believed that virtue was the only good. They stressed independence from worldly needs and pleasures. Cynics were critical of the rest of society and their material interests—they always questioned the sincerity and goodness of people. Hence the term, cynical.

None of these schools of philosophy are sufficient to describe Qohelet. A king who was in covenant with God wrote Eccl.. Solomon was a man who feared God and who sought to enjoy life under the sun, while being accountable to God for all of his actions. Solomon wanted to impart this knowledge and experience to his posterity. Eccl. was written for our admonition. Keil and Delitzsch note that Solomon was a man of a joyful disposition, but not superfluous or in denial. A. Bertholet says that Solomon, as Qohelet, did not try to harmonize Hebrew language with Pagan Greek culture—the source of all societal ruin. Solomon sought to know the end of all things under the sun. To do this, he pursues satisfaction as a thinker and as a scholar. He then seeks luxury, activity, enterprise, and achievement, yet, even though no one better than he could pursue this goal, even he, Solomon, is still perplexed. He then seeks to provide us with coping mechanisms for the frustrating life under the sun.

### **To whom is Qohelet writing and why?**

The message of Eccl. leads one to the everlasting gospel—Rev. 14:7: Fear God and give Him glory; this leads one to Christ, the Word of the Father. Qohelet is writing his message to a people in covenant with God. Qohelet assumes that his readers will understand the fear of the one True God—Yahweh. He could not have been writing to any of the polytheistic cultures that surrounded Jerusalem. He wrote to a people, most likely, familiar with His Proverbs. More specifically, he was speaking, whether literally or metaphorically, to a young man, a son (see 11:9; 12:12 and Proverbs). He wants covenant youth to understand their own mortality in light of God's sovereignty during their numbered days under the sun. Solomon teaches regarding the frustration of life and how to avoid its misery. Qohelet also wants to help his hearers/readers better understand the place and application of wisdom under the sun. For there is a proper time and season for every act of wisdom under the sun. Wisdom includes understanding the right time for all. Is Qohelet calling the people to seize the day (*carpe diem*), that is, live life to the fullest regardless of God? No, he is telling his audience to recognize that even wise men should enjoy the lawful pleasures of life (God's portion) to lighten the load of living a life of frustration under the sun (5:18-19). The New Geneva Study Bible sums it well regarding the audience of Eccl. as it states that most Christian and Jewish interpreters have understood the book to be addressed to God's people, rather than to those who are ignorant of God or in rebellion against Him. The book is God's wise counsel to those who know His ways but have found them perplexing and troubling. The message of

Eccl. leads one to the everlasting gospel—fear God and give Him glory (Rev. 14:7)—which ultimately leads one to Christ, the Word of the Father.

Qohelet believes that the one true God gives good gifts to men, is sovereign over all, is the Creator of all, and is the one to whom we all owe our existence. At this point in redemptive history we have no full theology of life after death, however, Qohelet doesn't deny the afterlife. In fact, he states that eternity is placed in the heart of man. Qohelet does understand the everlasting gospel: Fear God and keep His commandments (Rev. 14:7). He seems to find an unarticulated comfort in enjoying life before God and teaching others, especially young men, to do the same. He has resolved that man cannot know all of God's way or purposes, therefore, man should resolve to enjoy their lives under the sun as they seek to glorify Him. Even Jesus, Himself, submitted to the vanity of this world to free the elect from purposelessness. Christ obeyed God perfectly, yet was cut off from the living by His Father. His Father forsook him for a moment. This is frustration. Christ, through His death, restores purpose to wisdom, labor, and love. Because of Christ's hope after death, he endured the cross and despised its shame (Heb 12). Qohelet teaches us how to cope with the frustration. Christ and His apostles expound upon the hope of glory that strengthens our hearts amidst life's frustrations.

### **Literary Elements of Ecclesiastes:**

To impart his wisdom for life under the sun, Qohelet uses reflections (observations of truth which he ponders and evaluates—1:5, 13-15, 16-18, 2:1-11, 2:12-17), proverbs (pithy, highly stylized statements of truth about life—most common is the “better than” proverb), anecdotes (a short story told to illustrate a principle or truth of interest to the author—2:21; 4:7-8, 13-16; 9:13-16; 10:5-7), and instructions (a teaching whereby the author seeks to persuade his reader toward or away from a certain course of behavior or thought—4:17-5:2). Even though Eccl. enjoys the pleasure of all of these literary categories for Qohelet's expression, theologians throughout church history have not agreed on a literary structure for this book. Some have even said that they are inspired ramblings. Jerome said that all attempts to show, in the whole, not only oneness of spirit, but also a genetic progress, an all-embracing plan, and an organic connection, have hitherto failed, and must fail. Wyngaarden sees Eccl. as a series of goads (perplexities) and corresponding nails (answers or coping mechanisms). I have found it helpful to break the book, sometimes referred to as the Song of the Fear of God, into four primary divisions: **one, Life under the sun is the ultimate frustration Eccl. 1:1-13; two, Man should enjoy the good in his toils under the sun as he labors while unsure of God's ultimate decree Eccl. 1:14-6:12; three, Wisdom is better than folly Eccl. 7:1-11:6; and four, Conclusion and Resolve: Fear God and Keep His Commandments early in life and throughout life Eccl. 11:7-12:14.** More specifically, Eccl. has an introduction in verse 1, a theme in Chapter 1:2-11, the justification of the theme in Chapters 1:12-12:7, a reiteration of the theme in Chapter 12:8, and a conclusion in Chapters 11:7-12:14.

The book has a literary repetitiveness about it. I also see a sevenfold structure made up of seven pounding waves of frustration each followed by seven cool waves of resolve.

These waves of frustration could easily be called the goads (Eccl. 12:11) while the resolve, or waves of resolve, could easily be the “well-driven” nails of the scholars.

1. Wave of frustration 1: 1:1-2:23 and resolve 2:24-26
2. Wave of frustration 2: 3:1-3:11 and resolve 3:12-13
3. Wave of frustration 3: 3:14-3:21 and resolve 3:22
4. Wave of frustration 4: 4:1-5:17 and resolve 5:18-20
5. Wave of frustration 5: 6:1-8:14 and resolve 8:15
6. Wave of frustration 6: 8:16-9:6 and resolve 9:7-9:12
7. Wave of frustration 7: 9:13-11:6 and resolve 11:7-12:14

In summary, as the NGSB states that Eccl. teaches how God’s elect pilgrims in this world, under the sun (1 Pet. 1:1), but also citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), should live amid the profound frustrations and tensions of the present...age (Rom. 8:18-23). With this introduction, let us study a book, which teaches the covenant community how to cope with the greatest frustration of all—life under the sun. Let us study how to enjoy the portions of goodness that the Lord gives us during this frustrating life. Let us learn the fear of God by studying the teachings of Qohelet.

**Primary Sources:** Josephus on Solomon; Keil and Delitzsch on Eccl.; Tremper Longman III in “The Book of Eccl.” (NICOT), and Charles Bridges, Eccl. (Geneva Series).

### *Wave of frustration 1: 1:1-2:23 and resolve 2:24-26*

#### **I. Life under the sun is the ultimate frustration Ecc. 1:1-2**

<sup>Verse 1</sup> [The] words of the Assembler of the Covenant Community, son of David, king in Jerusalem: <sup>Verse 2</sup> Frustration of frustrations, the Assembler of the Covenant Community said, frustration of frustrations, all is frustrating.

- Qohelet begins his discourse of wisdom’s application under the sun with what is known and familiar among the writings of the ancient Canaanites as an autobiographical introduction (cf. the autobiographical conclusion in Chap. 12). It can be deduced that these are certainly the words of Solomon, the son of David, and who was also the king in Jerusalem. We should note a similar introduction to Proverbs 1:1 and Song of Songs 1:1. Longman notes that this discourse was probably written for the covenant community as opposed to being spoken to them. After Solomon, the son of David from Bathsheba, the wisest king in all of Israel, introduces himself he sets the mood for his discourse in verse two.
- We’ve already noted that Hebel, translated as vanity in the KJV, means frustration or meaninglessness. Although the essence, or overall message of Eccl. is “Young man, this is the reality of and how you resolve your mortality and God’s sovereignty under the sun,” the theme of Eccl. is meaninglessness of meaninglessnesses, in other words, the most meaningless and most frustrating of all. In verses 3-11, Solomon

substantiates this theme or motto by revealing that this meaninglessness is referring to life on the earth, more poetically referred to as life under the sun. He says that the whole [of everything] is frustrating; everything is frustrating. This is a very similar construction as that in Eccl. 12:13: Fear God and Keep His Commandments, this is the all of the man. All things are meaningless, without end, without purpose in the highest degree. It is a word used to describe that which is as a “breath,” as the contrast of that which is firm and enduring. That which is Hebel is the figure of that which has no support, and no continuance. Man’s life is as breath (Ps. 39:5-6; 62:9-12).

- Solomon is saying that everything about which he is to speak is both transitory in nature and without ultimate purpose. Solomon points this out throughout Eccl. We should note that he begins Proverbs and Song of Songs in a similar manner: theme, then discourse. Compare the themes of the Song of Songs and Vanity of Vanities.
- Solomon’s theme is presented within the context of a full knowledge on his part that God is both transcendent (Eccl 12:13) and imminent (Eccl. 2:26—To the man who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God). This is imminence and transcendence: the characteristics of our Heavenly Father, the one true God in whom Solomon believed. Many believe that Solomon did not have this knowledge, but this is not true. Solomon believed that God placed eternity in the hearts of man (Eccl. 3:11), yet, the most frustrating thing about this is that man, with this eternity in his heart, man cannot comprehend the ultimate end of all his or God’s labors. In addition, though he be a wise man, man can never know God’s overall scheme of things. Only God knows these things (see Deut. 29:29—here Moses must trust the faithfulness of God regarding Israel’s future (a future he is aware of, but in which he is not sure what will happen), but what Moses knows how to do, keep God’s commandments, is revealed to him. And that he will do).
- Solomon will reveal that this meaninglessness is confined to life on earth; to man’s works under the sun. Paul the Apostle reveals this frustration to which all creation under the sun has been subjected. What Solomon doesn’t elaborate upon is that God has subjected all of creation to futility in hope of being glorified and set free from ultimate frustration—death. Solomon recognizes that all works glorify God, those works such as keeping God’s commands, and even the works of the wicked fulfill His purpose. Solomon’s purpose in Eccl. is not to elaborate upon hope, but to instruct how one should cope with the frustrating nature of life under the sun and with the frustrating limitations of man’s mortality. He will teach that under the sun being wise is better than being a fool, for he will conclude that he fears God and keeps his commands while resolving that there is no knowing of ultimate purpose while living life under the sun. This theme of meaninglessness will be now scoped and substantiated by the next few verses 3-11.

**A. God has decreed a cycle of futility under the sun: the conclusions of Solomon which led to his theme of frustration (Eccl 1:3-11)**

**Verse 3** What gain is there to man from all his hard labor to which he toils under the sun. **Verse 4** A generation is going and a generation is coming, but the earth is remaining forever. **Verse 5** The sun rises and the sun sets and to his place he wearily [returns]. **Verse 6** Blowing to the South and turning around to the North, the wind is going around and around, and on his roundabout the wind is returning. **Verse 7** All of the streams are flowing to the sea, but the sea is never full, from the place where the streams are coming, there they are returning. **Verse 8** All things are wearisome, a man is not able to say; the eye is never satisfied with seeing, and the ear is never satisfied with hearing. **Verse 9** That which was, will be, and what was done, will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. **Verse 10** Is there anything of which one can say, “See, this is new?” But, it was already here long ago. It existed before our time. **Verse 11** There is currently no remembrance of the chief men, and moreover, the ones coming later will not be remembered by those coming later than they.

- Having expressed the theme of his discourse, Solomon now presents the discoveries that support and have led him to his concluding theme. He justifies the negative truth in the theme. We should note that in these first 11 verses of prose, this first rhetorical question is in regard to man’s works in terms of God’s overarching providential work. The works of man, as will be presented throughout Eccl., will be works that occur amidst the frustration of all frustrations—life under the sun. We should note the futility of all of creation’s labors. As New Testament believers, we know that this frustration carries with it the hope of glory, nonetheless, life is still frustrating, continuous, and repetitious. The long, drawn-out, and monotonous manner in which these verses are presented is wearisome.
- Qohelet asks, rhetorically, what gain, what profit, what is there over and above the expenses (financial term of Canaanite-Phoenician origin), can be derived from all of man’s drudgery under the sun? Certainly, if there is no meaning—ultimately, then there is no profit. Note Eccl. 3:9 and 5:15. Paul understood this as he wrote in 1 Ti. 6:6-10: *Now, godliness and contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content...* What profit is there over and above that which it took to live the life God ordained for you? Nothing. Solomon knew that all who read this discourse would answer, “Nothing.” No one can know the ultimate end of all that he does, whether of the rearing children (For what will God use them? Will they die young?), the toil of a vocation (Why has God placed you here doing this?), or of any other labor.
- Qohelet calls mankind’s labor, toil. Man’s labors are hard and considered drudgery, yet they should be done heartily with all of the strength that God supplies. His work is repetitious, wearisome, and of no ultimate gain. That which he shall accomplish will be cut short by his death, and will ultimately be forgotten, only to be re-



accomplished by another who has forgotten the works of the former accomplisher. Hence the phrase, there is nothing new under the sun.

- Under the sun is an ancient expression referring to the terrestrial (Gilgamesh Epic). As the Greeks wrote, "...only the gods live forever under the sun (on the earth), as for mankind, his days are numbered...they are but wind."
- Under the sun, you will find mankind, the physical elements, and all of mankind's works. Herein lies the scope of all that is the ultimate in frustration. It is not God who is frustrating, but it is that which was created, that which was subjected to futility, yet, as we know from the inspired writings of others, this subjection to futility was done so by God along with the hope of glory.
- One can read that Qohelet feels the frustration of life under the sun. Even though the Bible teaches us that redemptive history is linear with an end toward the glorifying of the sons of God, within it we note a cyclical phenomenon. Hebrew participles denoting on-going, repetitive activity, are used to describe the sameness of creation amidst illusory change. Verses 3-7 reveal the endless cycle of activity within creation. Verses 8-11 reveal the endless cycle of human activity.
- A generation is coming and one is going, but the earth remains the same. Jerome has noted the interesting fact that humans, who are to rule the earth, simply live and turn to dust, while the earth remains (note that the earth endures Ps. 119:90). Nothing ever changes except perhaps the time. In the midst of apparent activity, the earth remains the same. This is meaningless—without purpose. To support the theme of Eccl., this verse and those following exhibit repetition and continuation.
- Having noted that generations of people are coming and going, Solomon now turns our attention to the weariness and ceaseless change inherent in the elements of the earth: the sun, the winds, and the waters. The sun rises and the sun sets staying always within its circuit. Once it sets, it drags, crawls, or gaspingly returns to start its routine again. Even though we know that the earth turns in various ways because of the seasons, it, nonetheless, stays on its same annual course and repeats it annually, faithfully.
- No one knows the way of the wind except God (John 3:8, Eccl. 11:5). It, indeed, blows to the South and then to the North, around and around it goes. No one knows its origins or its end—where is it ultimately going—frustration—I cannot know this.
- Nor can a man know the ultimate purpose for which streams of water empty into the devouring sea and, yet, the seas are never full, or satisfied. Crenshaw has noted that Solomon may have in mind how that the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea, yet the Dead Sea is never full, nor does it overflow its banks. God has decreed the boundaries of the seas (Jer. 5:22) and no matter how many rivers flow into them, they shall never be more than full. There is no gain, or excess here. The rivers and seas

seem to change, but they are not changing. They remain the same. All this movement of the sun, wind, and seas, yet, what's the purpose?, what's the profit?.

- As verse 8 says, all things, generations, the sun, the wind, and the sea, are wearisome, or full of labor—they are all working actively, continuously, repetitively, and meaninglessly. The activity and vanity of all things under the sun is unutterable, beyond words, one cannot say. In actuality everything is the same. Nothing really, in terms of its essence, ever changes. As a result, human experience is dull and unsatisfying. This is why that godliness and contentment in this life is such great gain. The weariness of all things is so mind-boggling that it exceeds human ability to describe it. Just as the sun is never through rising and setting, and the wind is never through with its blowing activities, and the seas are never full of water, so mankind is characterized by insatiable desire. We note here and also in Eccl. 4:7-8 that the eyes and ears are never full of sense. Our sense organs want more because all things under the sun beg for our attention. They beg to be seen, heard, smelled, touched, tasted. This insatiability of mankind is always before the Lord (Pr. 15:11). We should also note that Hell and the grave are also never full (Pr. 27:20). Let us fear God and keep His commandments.
- Keil and Delitzsch have stated that the activities of the generations, the sun, the wind, and the sea are meant to show that “restless activity reaching no visible conclusion and end, always beginning again anew, pervades the whole world—all things, he says, summarizing, are in labour, i.e, are restless, hastening on, giving the impression of fatigue.” They add that this unrest in the outer world reflects itself in man, when he contemplates that which is done around him; human language cannot exhaust this coming and going, this growth and decay in constant circle, and the continuing sameness is so great, that the eye, ear and mind are not satisfied. Its not that are eyes and ears are so inherently voracious, but that the force with which the restless activity which surrounds us lays hold of and communicates itself to us, so that we also find no rest and enjoyment.
- With regard to the works of creation, mankind's works under the sun, that which was, will be, and what was done, will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. This statement is consistent with a linear history. God himself did a new thing in establishing the New Covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Man's works, on the other hand, are continual and repetitive. God does new things (Num. 16:30), but man does that which has already been, and furthermore, God requires an account from man regarding what has been accomplished (Eccl. 3:15). The NGSB says that verses 9-11 reveal that cultural endeavors cannot reverse the futile process of repeating what has already been done, for all die and their works are forgotten. Yes, the memory of the righteous is blessed, but their works, unless recorded in the redemptive writ, will be forgotten. We note a similar, but unbiblical attitude, among the New Testament skeptics in 2 Pet. 3:3-5. So, God orchestrates and governs history and it in redeems His elect, but creation is subjected to futility—a never-ending sameness that is full of activity with no ultimate end that we can know.

- Is there anything new which had not existed before? No, its existed before. We think our discoveries are unique only to find out that Egyptians, Babylonians, or, perhaps, Leonardo DaVinci has thought of them before. Longman notes that a number of commentators declare that inventions and innovations are not new but simply rediscoveries of what had been forgotten in the past. Those who acknowledge that some things are new (space travel, Internet, nuclear power) point out that, although technological advances are new, the people who wield them are not. Human beings of today are the same sinful human beings of the past, and thus there are no new developments or progress in the human race. Ernst Hengstenberg says, “Many an undertaking gives promise at its commencement of passing beyond the limits fixed by the old curse-laden world. The world exultingly shouts them welcome. But very soon it becomes evident that in them also a worm is concealed, and they sink down to a level with that which our poor earth has produced in former ages.”
- Solomon says in Eccl. 2:16 that there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. In verse 11, Qohelet seems to conclude the substantiating verses that lead to the Eccl. theme of verse 2. No matter what great works that men have done, they and their works, although very important before God, will be forgotten by all those under the sun. This would be a good place for a, “Selah.” It makes the reader pause and contemplate the truth to the words, “meaninglessness of meaninglessnesses, all is meaningless.” Longman notes that this verse does more than depress us with our ignorance of the past in the present. It reminds us that we should not expect anything different in the future. Those generations that follow us will be ignorant of who we are and what we are doing just as we are ignorant of the past of those who preceded us. Thus, significance is not located in the past or the future, or even in the present.
- The Preacher has taught us the theme (all things under the sun are the ultimate in frustration) and its supporting conclusions from creation, now Solomon tells us how he came to these conclusions. He now will speak to us regarding the works of man, the comparison of wisdom and folly, and man’s responsibility to a transcendent, yet immanent God. Solomon unfolds the riches of his wisdom to teach us how to cope with life in a frustrated world.

**B. All men occupy themselves under the sun, and Solomon has occupied himself with the pursuit of ultimate meaning (Eccl 1:12-13)**

Chapter 1:12-13 Autobiographical Introduction (Note the framing of the book)

**Verse 12 Even I, Qohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. Verse 13 I gave my heart to seek and to search out wisely all that is done under the heavens. This heavy burden God has given to the sons of man to occupy him.**

- Qohelet introduces himself seemingly in a manner apart from history. He never calls himself Solomon, though we can be sure that this is, indeed, Solomon, and we will indeed refer to him as such throughout the rest of this study. Keil and Delitzsch state

that only Solomon and David were kings over all Israel—no one else fit this bill. He unfolds the treasure of his life experience as king. “He has been king—king over a great, populous, highly cultivated city—and thus placed on an elevation having the widest survey, and having at his disposal whatever can make a man happy; endowed (1 Ki. 3:12-14), in particular, with all the means of gaining knowledge, which accorded with the disposition of his heart searching after wisdom.”

- The Scriptures reveal Solomon as the one blessed with wisdom, riches, long life, and peace. He sought out to understand the ultimate end of all things with which men could occupy themselves. He set his heart toward that end. He didn't just contemplate this, he set his heart to truly find these things out, while maintaining his wisdom. He sought out the meaning of life under the sun while operating in the wisdom with which God had blessed him. Solomon searched for the root of all matters and wanted to investigate them from all sides. It is interesting to note that Solomon says that God has placed this drive to know in all of mankind. As Dr. C. Gregg Singer has rightly spoken, “God has made us to know and has placed us in a knowable world. We are to search out all that we can, not as an end in and of itself, but in our pursuit to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Yet, this search to know all that can be known is a toilsome task, a burden. This research task is referred to as “a sore trouble” because the attainment and result gained by the laborious effort are of so unsatisfactory of a nature.
- Literarily speaking, Qohelet refers to himself in the first person through the rest of the book. This first person discussion is framed by the introduction of Eccl. 1:1-11 and by the conclusion of Eccl. 12:9-14. Now, having introduced the theme of the book and the quest of the king, Solomon declares and substantiates his conclusion already articulated in Eccl. 1:2

## **II. Man should enjoy the good things from the fruit of his toil as he submits to Providence Eccl. 1:14-3:15:**

- Knowing that God, since the Fall, has subjected all of creation, all that which is under the sun, to futility (frustration), Solomon, in this second section, substantiates the theme of frustration by elaborating upon God's decree and the accomplishment of man's work in the context of this decree. The frustration of man's work represents one of the first goads (Eccl. 12:11) identified in Eccl. Martin J. Wyngaarden has called these goads problems which serve as incentives for investigation. The well driven nails (Eccl. 12:11), on the other hand, are the solutions to these problems. Only the wise can know this, investigate this, and determine a resolve for this.

**1. God's decree is unchangeable 1:14-15:** The Westminster divines have written in the WCF Chapter III that God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.... WCF Shorter Catechism Question #7 states: What are the decrees of God? The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

**Verse 14 I saw all of the things that are being done under the sun. And See! All things are without ultimate purpose and striving after the wind. Verse 15 Bent things cannot be straightened; things lacking cannot be counted.**

- As the greatest king of all, Solomon investigated all things under the sun. God blessed him with the capability, position, and the resolve to do this and, furthermore, to document his work and his conclusions. What did he find? Futility. He concluded that all things with which men may occupy themselves were ultimately frustrating and that they have no power to change the ultimate decree of God. Man cannot control a thing in this life, although he may think he can. Why can't man control all of his works and why can't he map and fulfill his own course? Because God has ordained all things that will come to pass, and, that decree, although worked out in the lives of men, is not subject to man's control. The course that God has decreed is set and He changes not. Things bent cannot be straightened, and things that are not there cannot be counted. This second section begins with this truth of God's decree and ends with it in Eccl. 3:14-15. God decrees and controls all things that men may learn to fear Him. God also, as we shall learn, reveals Himself to man that man may fear Him and keep His commands. Yet, man cannot find out the work that God does from beginning to end (Eccl. 3:11). Man cannot truly understand how his works fit in with God's grand scheme of glory and redemption. That is why life under the sun is frustrating for man—at least for the man with wisdom. Think of it, one doesn't know all that he will do, and he doesn't continue his work because of death.
- Longman says that in summary, something is fundamentally wrong with life on earth, and, since the world has come about as it is by the decree of God, there is absolutely nothing that humans can do about it. Keil and Delitzsch (K&D) state that verse 15 places before the observer irregularities and wants regarding things under the sun, which are certainly partly brought about and destined by God, but for the most part are due to the transgressions of man himself—and what avails the observer the discovery and investigation—he has only lamentation over it, for with all his wisdom he can bring no help. There is no satisfaction, nor ultimate end under the sun.

## **2. Man should joyfully occupy himself under the sun, while accepting his finiteness, and while keeping these precepts in mind: 1:16-2:11**

- Given God's decree, man must occupy himself while alive under the sun. After all, men are to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (WCF SC #1). Man glorifies God in his works, which he is to work with all his might (Eccl. 9:10). For the sloth suffers bad consequences (Eccl. 10:18). Man cannot resolve to be a determinist—one believing that since God has determined all, man, as a consequence, has no active part in life—he must live actively not passively in life. Man can seek to change things, however, the ultimate change and purpose is in the hands of God. Note the work of God regarding man's free will and God's sovereign decree in Proverbs 20:24; Proverbs 16:9.

As a man occupies himself, he must understand that life under heaven is accomplished in futility; however, Solomon gives wisdom for how to cope with this truth.

### **A. The more wisdom a man possesses; the more grief he has 1:16-18**

**Verse 16 I said in my heart saying, I, look, even I, became great and increased in wisdom above all who were before me [ruling] over Jerusalem; and my heart saw much wisdom and knowledge. Verse 17 I gave myself to understand wisdom and to understand madness and folly. I learned, moreover, that this is chasing after that which is fleeting. Verse 18 For with much wisdom is much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.**

- Verses 16-18 are a reflection of Solomon. He devoted himself to pursuing wisdom. He sought out the wisdom under the sun, just as the spies searched out the promised land. He became great and increased in wisdom. Solomon uses repetitions to perhaps, confirm his conclusion literarily that life is repetitive and monotonous. Why did Solomon busy himself with this pursuit? God placed it within his heart. Solomon's proverbs emphasize wisdom as the chief thing, and Solomon's Ecclesiastes reveals that, ultimately, wisdom, itself, is frustrating.
- He concludes here that even his pursuit of wisdom, on the one hand, and madness and folly, on the other hand, resulted in an insufficient knowledge of all things. He proves to himself that nothing showed itself to be real, i.e., firm and enduring, unimpeachable, and imperishable. We know that wisdom is the prudent (well thought out) use of knowledge at the appropriate time.
- Madness, here, is the irrational aspect of insanity, whereas folly, the antonym of wisdom, is the behavioral aspect of insanity. A mad man's actions are folly. Given the nature of God, it is irrational to sin (Ps. 5:4-6). Furthermore, God's wrath makes sinners even more mad (insane) (Jer 51:7; 25:16).
- Given this, Solomon has a conclusion to be kept in mind. The more wisdom he gained, the more sorrowful, vexed, and grieved he became. The Germans say that "much wisdom causes a headache." This is mental grief. The more he knew, the more he determined that he had to know, yet the pursuit is as if one were trying to catch the wind. K&D have written that the wise man gains an insight into the thousand-fold woes of the natural world, and of the world of human beings, and this reflects itself in him without his being able to change it; hence the more numerous the observed forms of evil, suffering, and discord, so much greater the sadness. We cannot know as God knows. This obtaining of wisdom of which Solomon speaks is called a sore trouble because the attainment and result gained by the laborious effort are of so unsatisfactory a nature.
- The wise man knows the futility of things and that he must ultimately die and leave his life and his works accomplished under the sun. This truth is a grievous thing to the wise man, yet to know this is a coping mechanism for the frustration encountered

under the sun. The fool, on the other hand, has no idea to even think about the ultimate end of things, for God graces the fool to be occupied gathering things for ultimate displacement to the wise—the righteous.

- Wisdom is profitable because it makes one wise for salvation (2 Ti. 3:15). The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God, which is why God controls the acts of men—that they may fear Him. Solomon will conclude that the all of man is to fear God and to keep His commands (Eccl 12:13-14). So, Solomon is not condemning the pursuit and accomplishment of wisdom, he is teaching men the ramifications of having such wisdom. And Solomon speaks from experience as the wisest man of all.
- Solomon now, while maintaining his wisdom, seeks for the meaning, or ultimate end, of pleasure and greatness. He desires to know the greatest good. He wants to know the end of all things. He begins to reflect on pleasure and greatness as recorded in 2:1-11.
- Another aspect that man should keep in mind while occupying himself under the sun is that:

### **B. Gaiety and a pleasurable life have no ultimate end 2:1-3**

**Chapter 2 Verse 1 I, even I, said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with gaiety to find the good thing [in this life]. But see, moreover that this is meaningless. Verse 2 I said joyous laughter is madness. And to make gaiety, what is it accomplishing? Verse 3 I mentally explored by cheering my heart with wine and taking possession of folly, while guiding my heart with wisdom, until I saw what was good for the sons of men to do under the heavens during all of their days.**

- Solomon ponders a life of meaning and pleasure. He is not unrestrained in his ponderings for he guided his heart with wisdom. He, not finding ultimate satisfaction with wisdom, seeks to find satisfaction and ultimate meaning in living a life of pleasure. He seeks to draw his flesh into a willing obedience by means of pleasant attractions. This pursuit proves frustrating. Solomon calls it insane. Moreover, in a self-controlled manner, Solomon sought to cheer his heart with wine and to embrace pleasurable behavior—folly. He is a connoisseur, not a debauchee, of wine, yet he pursues it lawfully and not with drunkenness in mind. Leupold says that it would be hard to believe that Solomon would ever have become drunk. K&D say that he wished to have wisdom, but in measure, without losing himself in enjoyment, and thereby destroying himself. He wished to give himself over to sweet *desipere*, but yet with wise self-possession to lick the honey and avoid the gall.
- Solomon's objective in doing this was to determine what was the greatest, ultimate good for the sons of man under the sun. What is the good life, the ultimate, meaningful life with which the sons of men occupy themselves during the time they have under the sun. He obviously found that the life of pleasure had no end to it, no fulfilling, all meaningful objective. Solomon found the life of pleasure unfulfilling—

futile, frustrating. Solomon had all of the worldly and sensual delights, yet devotedness to joyous laughter was to him vanity.

- K&D say that Solomon had the sense that this was not the true way to happiness and fulfillment. He was compelled to say to laughter that, “you are mad.” Solomon finds that joy, as an end in and of itself, disregards the earnestness of life and all due bounds, and he is therefore constrained to say, “What does it result in?” Therefore, the life of endless, lawful pleasure is frustrating.
- Another aspect that man should keep in mind while occupying himself under the sun is that:

### C. Accomplishing greatness is without ultimate end 2:4-11

**Verse 4 I caused my works to be great: I built for myself houses; I planted for myself vineyards. Verse 5 I made for myself gardens and park/preserves and I planted in them trees with all kinds of fruits. Verse 6 I made pools of water to water groves of flourishing trees. Verse 7 I acquired male servants, and maidens (female servants), and sons born in my house. Also, [I acquired] to myself many cattle herds and flocks, more than any who were before me in Jerusalem. Verse 8 Moreover, I gathered to myself silver, and gold, and [the] property of kings and of provinces. I acquired to myself singing men and singing women, and delights of the sons of man, [even a harem]. Verse 9 I became great and I added to myself more than anyone who was before me in Jerusalem. Indeed, my wisdom stood with me. Verse 10 And all for which my eyes asked, I did not lay aside from them. I did not withhold from my heart any joy. Indeed, my heart delighted in all my work, and this was my share for all of my labor. Verse 11 When I, even I, looked from every vantage point to all my deeds and to all the toil that I toiled to achieve with my hands, behold, all is frustrating and chasing after the wind, nothing was gained under the sun.**

- 1 Ki. 4:20 states that Solomon’s reign over Israel was characterized by social eating, drinking, and rejoicing. This culture experienced the pleasure of righteousness and wisdom. This was not an Epicurean society. God blessed Israel for she, at this time, feared Him and obeyed Him. Israel’s population was as the sand of the sea. The land was at peace after the war-riddled days of David his father. The Kingdom of God’s Israel was experiencing its greatest glory under the sun. Yet, what started as glorious, did end in frustration. Solomon was a connoisseur of all that was great. We know historically that he separated Israel’s land into taxable districts upon which he laid very heavy tax burdens. Solomon was lavish in his pursuit of greatness. The whole then known world flocked to Israel to meet and to hear Solomon. Jerusalem was a major trading route city. Solomon had access to all goods from Europe to Asia. Solomon was very, very rich. He was wise and possessed man’s prized possession—diligence. In this long reflection which begins in Eccl. 2:1 and ends in verse 11, he writes how he diligently built, acquired, and sought all that would be a blessing to his heart. He had a large household, gardens well irrigated and filled with bountiful fruit trees life that of Eden. Solomon also had herds of cattle, riches and jewels, and



servants and concubines, which he enjoyed. He enjoyed all while guiding his heart with wisdom. He pursued greatness, yet it was temporal.

- Although the words, which are translated here in verse 8 as, “many concubines,” or “a multitude of women,” are undetermined with regard to exact meaning, Longman says that the context in which these curious words lie is not unclear. The context is, “the pleasure of men.” Translations in the past have either been “wine cup bearers,” or concubines. Remember, concubines were wives, however, on a lesser order. The context, I believe, shows that the concubines are here to show the luxury which Solomon enjoyed, and is not necessarily a reference to unrestrained erotic behavior. I believe we must remember that Solomon used his life and resources to find the meaning of life under the sun WHILE MAINTAINING HIS WISDOM. Perhaps he acquired these extra women, besides his marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter, in his pursuit of greatness, however, we do note in 1 Ki. that these wives caused him to stray in heart from Yahweh.
- Well, as taught earlier, he acquired all of these great and sensual delights to fulfill his desire for lawful pleasure. He restrained his eyes from nothing that buildings, gardens, wine, women, and song could give.
- Solomon is quick to say that the results of his works were his portion or reward from the Lord. The Lord gave them to him. It was Solomon’s heritage for his occupations. So, the Lord does, indeed, reward those who labor and toil under the sun. We see the Lord’s portion to man described in Psalm 16. Solomon received a reward for his labor of searching for meaning in a created, fallen world. Longman says that Qohelet discovered a reward for his efforts, the ultimate objects of his search, “profit,” and “meaning,” were lacking. Solomon worked hard, but there were no lasting results from his labors.
- Crenshaw says that Solomon’s experiment (finding meaning in greatness and pleasure) seemed to have been at odds with the warning of Num. 15:39: to not allow the lust of your eyes direct you away from Yahweh. I believe that it is clear that his pursuit did lead him astray into disobedience to God’s law in Deut 17:14-20 for he multiplied to himself gold, horses, and wives. Although he did these things in pursuit of meaning and the ultimate good, they led him astray unto idolatry. Matthew Henry rightly believed that Eccl. itself is a testimony of Solomon’s repentance. If Solomon wrote Eccl. in his latter days, then Eccl. 8:12-13 is clear proof of his awareness of God’s expectations of mankind. Well, in summary, Solomon’s pursuit of greatness and the pleasurable life was void of fulfillment. Seeing that these pursuits had no end, led to the conclusion that the pursuit of both was fleeting and frustrating, in turn leading him to document these reflections and findings in this book called Eccl.
- Another aspect that man should keep in mind while occupying himself under the sun is that:

#### D. Wisdom is better than folly in this life 2:12-16

<sup>Verse 12</sup> I, even I, turned to see wisdom and madness and folly. For what more can the man do who succeeds the king than that which has already been done. <sup>Verse 13</sup> I, even I, saw that there is more advantage to wisdom than there is to folly just as there is more value to the light than to the darkness. <sup>Verse 14</sup> The eyes of the wise man are in his head, while the fool is walking in the darkness, but I knew, moreover, that the same events [under the sovereign hand of God and, yet, unbeknownst to and out of the control of men] encounter all—the wise ones and the fools. <sup>Verse 15</sup> I said within my heart as these events encounter the fool, they will encounter me also. To what end, what gain, should I be wise? I then said in my heart that this also is frustrating. <sup>Verse 16</sup> For, there is no memory, forever, of the wise man as there is none for the fool; for the wise man will be forgotten in the coming days. Indeed, the wise man dies like the fool.

- Solomon turns from his analysis of great works to an analysis of wisdom itself. He quickly presents and then dismisses a pursuit of madness and folly. He concludes that as far as life under the sun is concerned, wisdom is better than and preferred over madness and folly. Regarding work, Solomon rhetorically asks what will his successor do more than himself. The answer is that his successor will do no more than himself. Occupations under the sun are repetitious; there is nothing new under the sun. Regarding madness and folly, Qohelet's experience has proven that there is more advantage to wisdom than to madness and folly, although wisdom has no ultimate advantage for a man. Under the sun, because of the fall of man, the wise man dies like the fool. We should note Solomon's elaboration upon the frustration of death in Eccl. 8:10-9:11 (Section III 7:1-11:16 Wisdom is better than folly). Even his writings are repetitious just like God's works under the sun.
- Wisdom enables a man to walk circumspectly before God in this life. A wise man has eyes to see and to interpret life rightly, although not exhaustively, under the sun; therefore he does not stumble through life. The fool is never able to “get on” with life, for his life is filled with never-ending obstacles because of his foolish decisions and manners. Solomon has said (Pr. 21:16-17) that the life of foolish pleasure leads to poverty and is, above all, a life of vanity. Solomon, the promoter of wisdom, wants us to learn here that a man who has wisdom will have a more delightful life under the sun, but ultimately that man will die like the fool who stumbles through his life. The foolish and the wise live and die before the sovereign hand of God. Many of your Bible versions use the word “fate” here to describe the governor of the wise and foolish; however, Qohelet would have never used a pagan Greek concept of “fate” to describe the governing power which rules the wise and the foolish. More accurately, the same events happen by the sovereign hand of God, yet out of the control of man, to the wise and to the foolish.
- What profit, or advantage is there to being wise? This is frustrating. Given that the wise shall die like the fool, why should I be wise? No one will ultimately remember either me or my works. Solomon begins to reveal that death frustrates the acquisition

of wisdom. Death cuts short the life of the wise man. Solomon seems, in this discourse, to be very occupied with the ramifications of death. He returns the theme often. Some writers have said that Solomon feared death. I believe that he was frustrated by it. It is the Christian's final enemy, and, as an enemy, it is frustrating to mankind in whom God has placed eternity, whether Christian or non-Christian. This event, death, which happens to all, is a vanity rendering all vain, a nullity leveling down all to nothing, something full of contradictions, irrational. Paul also speaks of this destruction in Rom. 8:20.

- Furthermore, Qohelet seems frustrated that wise men are not remembered forever by their successors under the sun. Pr. 10:7 states that the memory of the righteous shall be blessed and that the memory of the wicked shall rot. On the other hand, Solomon says that there will be no ultimate remembrance of the wise by their successors under the sun. K&D believe Eccl. 2:16 should be understood as a long run sense with regard to the wise. For the wise, there is no enduring or on-going remembrance forever under the sun; however, their near-term remembrance may be blessed.
- This leads us to another important aspect that man should keep in mind while occupying himself under the sun is that:

#### **E. Death frustrates a man's work 2:17-23**

**Verse 17** So I hated life because all the work that was done under the sun was unpleasant to me. All is meaningless and chasing after the wind. **Verse 18** I, even I, hated all of my toil to which I toiled under the sun, that I must bequeath it to the one who comes after me. **Verse 19** And who is knowing whether or not this one will be wise or will be a fool, yet he will domineer over all of my work for which I poured effort and wisdom under the sun. This also is frustrating! **Verse 20** So, I began to despair in my heart over all of the toil for which I labored under the sun. **Verse 21** For there is a man in which the work of him was accomplished with wisdom, with knowledge, and with skill and he must leave his property to a man who did not labor for it. This also is frustrating and a great misery. **Verse 22** For what is for a man for all of his toil and striving of heart which he is laboring under the sun? **Verse 23** For all of his days are painful and grievous, even at night he cannot rest his heart. This also is frustrating.

- Seeing the vanity of his great works, his pleasure, his wisdom, and finally his mortality, he concludes that he hates life under the sun. His frustration leads him to despair. This portion of section 2 depicts a threefold frustration (vs. 17 work, 21 wise labor, 23 sleeplessness). His possessions, acquired with such labor and restlessness, he must leave to others for equally with the fool he falls under the stroke of death, he himself has no enjoyment, others have it, dying, he must leave all begin him. His life became loathsome and without joy when he saw the ultimate frustration of it all. He hated the efforts of mankind and the ultimate end of his temporal life. He couldn't know the significance of all his occupation and he couldn't continue it to see it through and build it up. He knows that death will cut short his occupation and

pleasure. He realized that he would die and then leave all his work to another one. Furthermore, and even more loathsome, this other one may be a fool, and this fool, without any share in Solomon's work, will have the oversight and lordship over his works. Solomon speaks not about his son as one born after him, but he takes himself out of the historical progression and speaks of the one who will assume that for which he occupied himself all of his frustrating life.

- He asks the rhetorical question, "What does the man get for all his hard physical and mental labor under the sun?" The answer is the opportunity to leave it all to another. His busy labor doesn't permit him to sleep at night. The man driven to produce seems to have no peace and then he dies. We see in Ps. 127 that God's beloved saints are given sleep because His saints ultimate duty and purpose is to Glorify God and to enjoy Him forever by fearing God and keeping His commands. This is obviously frustrating. One can never ultimately know the disposition of all of his works once he leaves the land of the living. Solomon is aware of wills and the bequeathing of ones goods to his first born; however, he wants to reveal the real, total lack of control that living men have with regard to their works once they die. The wise man labors, builds, and wants to perpetuate something only to die like the lazy fool. K&D get to the point by saying that what one has gained by skill and...[blessing]...thus falls to the lot of another who perhaps recklessly squanders it. This is a frustrating thing all the greater in proportion to the labor and care bestowed upon its acquisition.
- After articulating the goad of work, wisdom, pleasure, greatness, and death under the sun, Solomon resolves that one should enjoy the portion that God has distributed to him. This is the first "well-driven" nail that depicts man's coping mechanism for the frustration of all frustrations--life under the sun.

#### **F. Resolve 1: Enjoy the pleasures of your life for they are a gift from God 2:24-26**

**Verse 24 There is nothing better for the man than that he should be eating and should be drinking and that he should be causing himself to see in his soul good in his work. This I see is from the hand of God. Verse 25 For who can be eating and who can be happy outside of God. Verse 26 For to the man who is well-pleasing before Him, He gives wisdom and knowledge and gladness, but to the sinning one he gives the occupation to gather and to collect in order to give [it] to the one who is pleasing before the face of God. This also is frustrating and chasing after the wind.**

- Knowing that God has subjected the creation, including mankind, to frustration under the sun, one should understand by this revelation from the inspired Qohelet that not everything at every time is full of sorrow. K&D specifically note that men should "pamper their souls" with their work. In other words, don't engage yourself in an endless search for a happy state of life, find enjoyment in that which God has enabled you to occupy yourself. This doesn't mean to forget trying to better yourself or your vocation, it simply means that you should enjoy yourself in the process while eating and drinking to the delight of your soul. The Hebrew language here suggests that a

man should cause himself to see the good in that which he occupies himself and to focus on it. Solomon thinks that it is best to connect together enjoyment and labor. Furthermore, the connection itself is a gift from God. For no one can truly know anything truly outside of God, His revelation, and His blessing to understand His revelation. One whom God has revealed these truths and has given them the power to obey them can truly enjoy his occupation (broadly defined as all that you do in your life, e.g., worshipping God, loving your wife, rearing children, vocation, hobbies.) under the sun. For, in verse 25, Solomon declares that, apart from God, who can eat, drink, or have enjoyment.

- God is very gracious to grant pleasure to men. He grants many an opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labors under the sun. I say to many and not all because Solomon declares that God does not give all men the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labor (Eccl. 6:1-2). This is a gift of grace from God. The gift to enjoy the fruits of one's occupation is a result of his pleasing God. It is the normal course of Providence that the righteous be given opportunity to enjoy a portion of goodness under the sun in the midst of their frustrating and brief life. God gives the good ones wisdom, knowledge, and joy (gladness). These recipients of these gifts from God are those who perform good works before His face. To do good in this book carries a two-fold sense: to do righteously and to do that which is beneficial. The Westminster Divines have define Good Works for us in Chapter XVI, Of Good Works:

1. Good works are only such as God has commanded in his holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention.

2. These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidence of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto. that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.

3. Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves. but wholly from the Spirit of Christ- And that they may be enabled thereunto, beside the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will, and to do, of his good pleasure: yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as il they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but the ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

4. They who, in their obedience, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do.

5. We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom, by them, we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants: and

because, as they are good, they proceed from his Spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.

6. Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprouvable in God's sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weakness and imperfections.

7. Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God: and yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God.

- It is also the normal course of Providence that sinners are occupied with gathering goods only for the purpose of giving them ultimately to the righteous. Solomon reveals to us that, from youth, God sees our works and judges them (Eccl 11:9-10).
- We noted back in verse 10 that Solomon enjoyed all of his labor. He had joy in accomplishing whatever the Lord gave him to occupy himself. He declared it as his portion from God. And since man cannot know all things exhaustively, or be satiated with the pleasurable life all of the time, or build the greatest things, or accomplish all of the greatest works, or continue to live under the sun, Solomon declares that there is nothing better than to be eating, and drinking, and causing himself to see the good in his work. God doesn't tell a man to find work that will ultimately fulfill him or his dreams, but to see in his own soul the good in the work which God enables him to do.
- This ability to eat, and to drink, and to find good in all that a man has from God is a blessing from the Lord, Himself. It is God who gives a man the power to eat of the fruits of his own labors. It is God who enables a man to truly enjoy his life. This is why Paul says that godliness and contentment is great gain, and that those who seek after riches pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim 6:6-10). Again, Solomon brings this instruction to a sober plane in Eccl. 5:18-6:2. So, instead of striving for the wind all of your life, enjoy the good that you have. Feast and make merry and rejoice with your wife and your children. We see the same exhortation in Eccl. 3:12, 13: rejoice, do good, eat, and enjoy the good in your labor, for this is the gift of God. Embrace this truth so that you may be a truly blessed Christian in this life. For this is your portion under the sun. Solomon wants us to be grounded in this reality lest we miss this great portion which comes to us while striving for the wind in other pursuits.
- This eat, drink, and rejoice command is a better than proverb. It is not a license to Seize the Day (Carpe Diem) without any accountability toward God. Solomon, himself, does not give license to live in unrestrained, unlawful pleasure for he has told us that the pursuit of ultimate pleasure is, itself, without ultimate purpose or

satisfaction. Note how he says to fear God (Eccl. 5:6), and that this fear of God and that keeping His commands is the whole of man (Eccl. 11:9-10; 12:13-14). It's the best we can do under the sun while we live temporarily frustrated lives in hope of God's glory. Longman says that in the darkness of life that has no meaning, one should enjoy the temporal pleasures which lighten the burden. Solomon exhorts us to enjoy the God-given pleasures of life many times throughout Eccl. (Eccl. 2:10, 12-16; 3:12, 13, 22 [rejoice in your works and do good in life], 5:18-20 [eat, drink, and enjoy your life]; 7:14 [be joyful]; 8:15; 9:7-10 [enjoy your wife and be vigorous at your work before you go to the grave]; and 11:9-10 [rejoice in your youth, remove sorrow from your heart, and live in the fear of God. For this is man's portion/lot/heritage from God above. Yet, even if we were to obey this instruction, and incorporate this attitude within us, it only profits us during our brief stay under the sun; therefore, even this enjoyment of life's God-given pleasures is fleeting, evanescent, and frustrating--vanity.

- If all of our labors are vanity under the sun, then what does Paul mean when he says that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. He certainly doesn't mean that simply ministry work is the only work not subject to frustration. This isn't so. He means that all of our works (e.g., loving our neighbors, working our vocations, rearing our children) as we are in Christ are working for us an eternal glory. Furthermore, because of our understanding of redemptive history beyond, perhaps, that of Solomon, we can not only learn to enjoy the good in the works of our hands, to understand the futility to which God has subjected creation, and to fear God because Christ has taught us to do the same. We can also endure life under the sun because we, as Christians, have the hope of glory. This excursus reveals Solomon's perspective of life under the sun and Paul's perspective of a glory beyond this life.

**Excursus 1: Futility and the Hope of Glory: Text: 1 Cor. 15:42-58; Rom. 8:18-30**

- From these texts God speaks to us that under the sun, in this life, because we bear the image of our father Adam, we have bodies of corruption, dishonor, and weakness. We, as Christians, because of the fall of Adam and the working of sin in our members, endure sufferings in this life, frustration, and we, along with all creation, groan within ourselves as with birth pangs, waiting for the redemption of our bodies into glory. We walk, or live, in this life with this hope, which doesn't disappoint, but encourages. We walk by faith, embracing glory by faith, faith being defined as the substance of the things for which we hope, which is glory itself.
- The glorious liberty of the sons of God is that state of glory where there will be no sorrow, frustration, mortality, or sin. Our bodies will set free from the workings of sin unto incorruption, glory, honor, immortality, and power. This is the hope of one who confesses Jesus is Lord and keeps His commandments. Just as we bore the image of fallen Adam, we shall bear the image of the great Christ Jesus, the life-giving spirit. The state in which the Christian now lives is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- The sinner, passed over by God and condemned to epistemological deprivation, is resolved to gather things in this life while being frustrated. God enables him to enjoy his collecting, for he has no hope beyond this life. He is dead and dying, while he lives. Oh, how we need to preach and to live the gospel of Jesus Christ before our neighbors.
- On the other hand, the regenerate one, he who is in Christ Jesus, has an earnest expectation. He knows that God will be faithful to give him glory because God has given him a down payment for this glory inheritance in the Holy Spirit, who resides in him. With this hope of glory revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, the Christian embraces victory over death while he lives. Death may frustrate his works upon the earth, but the Christian has an eternal weight of glory beyond this life. In Christ, the frustration of life under the sun is ultimately overcome. Death, which frustrates all under the sun, including we Christians (it is our last enemy), is swallowed up in victory. Immortality is grasped and sin is vanquished in Christ. This is the epistemological lot of those who are wise (fearing God and embracing Christ) under the sun. God gives this knowledge and the enjoyment of it.
- Paul says that, having this knowledge, we, as Christians, are to be steadfast, immovable, abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labors are not in vain in the Lord. Although we live in a world of frustration and we experience frustration in this world, we must remember that because of God's being for us and Christ's and the Holy Spirit's interceding for us, we know that all things are working together for the good because we are called according to God's purpose. We are still frustrated in this life because we can't know the ultimate end of all of our works (but they are working together for an ultimate good), you die and cannot continue your works, you can't control what happens in your life, and you cannot control when you die that which you've wisely gained. So, there is still vanity under the sun, even as a Christian. However, Solomon tells us that, regardless of these frustrations, we are to be eating, drinking, and enjoying our works and our wives and our days under the sun, for it is all fleeting. Paul adds that we should live our lives occupying ourselves as unto the Lord, knowing that our occupations are not ultimately in vain. He says this because Paul's scope of reference is eternal life whereas Solomon's scope, as identified earlier, was that which is under the sun—this side of glory. The profit we gain from Solomon is that he teaches us how to cope with frustration under the sun. We add to that what Paul teaches: that we have a hope—glory itself. Regarding hope, hear this from Spurgeon's sermon, "A Root Out of Dry Ground," delivered on the Lord's Day morning, Oct 13, 1872—some encouraging words about discouraging times.
- It must be mentioned that Solomon knew of a life beyond. He knew that all works would be judged. His father David spoke of life beyond the grave. He knew that God had an ultimate purpose for all of man's works. He didn't know what that purpose was or how his works fit in. He did not over emphasize the importance of his works in the grand scheme of things, but he did know that one should occupy one's self vigorously and enjoy the labor.



- This is the joy of having the complete canon of Scripture. We see that our labors are working for us an eternal weight of glory in Christ. Therefore, our labors, in the context of God's Providence, are not ultimately vanity, but, under the sun, they are fleeting at best. This knowledge teaches us the relationship between Eccl. and the rest of the Scriptures. From this we know the place that Eccl. has in redemptive history. By God's grace, with the fear of God (Eccl. 5:7) and the hope of glory (Col. 1:27) we experience faith, hope, love (for God and our neighbor), and joy under the sun. Everything else is fleeting, although working together for good for those who love God and are the called according to His purpose.

*Wave of frustration 2: 3:1-3:11 and resolve 3:12-13*

**G. God has decreed a time for all works under the sun 3:1-8**

Chapter 3 Verse 1 **For all there is an appointed time and a time for all activity under the heavens.** Verse 2 **A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot that which was planted;** Verse 3 **a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break through and a time to build;** Verse 4 **a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to wail and a time to dance;** Verse 5 **a time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to fold the hands and a time to refrain from folding them;** Verse 6 **a time to search and a time to give up searching, a time to keep and a time to throw away;** Verse 7 **a time to tear and a time to sew together, a time to be silent and a time to speak;** Verse 8 **a time to love and a time to hate; a time of battle and a time of peace.**

- We've considered man's works under the sun, and we've seen that these works are accomplished in accordance with God's holy decree. Solomon now describes a representation all of the works men do under the sun. Actually, these are the works that God has ordained, that men have accomplished, and which Qohelet has seen. Solomon is now working toward a conclusion of Section II (Man should enjoy the good in his toils under the sun as he labors while unsure of God's ultimate decree). He began this section with the sovereign, unchangeable works of God, continues with the frustrating, vain works of man, and then ends, here with God's appointed time for the execution of every one of His decrees.
- It is important to note that this listing of works under the sun is not prescriptive in nature. In other words, this list is not telling us to kill and to heal, and to tear apart and to sew together. After all, there is probably not a good time, in man's opinion, to die, to kill, and to tear apart, but these things do happen. This portion of section 2 of our Eccl. study is descriptive in nature describing all of the "activities" that can be seen under the sun. These are all of the works that God decrees under the sun, and He decrees for them to occur at their appointed time. Luther has translated verse 1 as, "Everything has its time, and every purpose under the sun its hour." Two different words are used for time in verse 1, yet the two words cannot be distinguished linguistically. They both connote an appointed time. The "proper time" is a subject

characteristic of ancient Near Eastern literature. From here, we should note fourteen pairs, containing semantic opposites, of events that occur under the sun.

- Verse 2 describes the beginning and end of man, along with the beginning and end of creation or plant life. Longman notes that these first two pairs encompass the entire life cycle, first of a human (be born...die) and then of a plant (plant...uproot). No person or plant controls the start or finish of its existence, so the descriptive nature of this list is established from the start. For man, there is a time appointed by God for one to be born and, by the decree of the same and one true God, there is a time to die. For all of creation, which, by the way, is subjected to the same futility as man, there is a time for planting seed, and an appointed time to uproot what has been planted.
- As Qohelet sees killing in the earth, he says that there is, indeed, a time to kill, and a time to be healed. This shows a time to end a life and a time to preserve it. In addition, verse 3 states that there is an appointed time to raze a city to the ground (break through or tear down), and a time to build up a city. Remember, Qohelet is not making moral statements, but is declaring observations.
- We move to the realm of emotions as verse 4 says that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to wail, perhaps due to grief because of a death, and a time to dance.
- In verse 5, Solomon reveals that there is an appointed time to destroy a field agriculturally by filling it with stones (cf. 2 Ki. 3:19, 25) and a time to collect stones from the field in order to plant something (Is. 5:2). Qohelet, the writer of Song of Songs, also tells us that there is a time appointed for embracing with affection (Pr. 5:20; Gen. 29:13) and a time to refrain from embracing affectionately.
- Verse 6 reveals that there is a time to search diligently for something, and then there is an appointed time to give the thing up as lost. Longman notes that just as it is impossible for people to know the day of their death, control their weeping and laughing or their mourning and rejoicing, so it is hard, sometimes impossible, to know when something is irrevocably lost. So, frustratingly, time will continue to be wasted looking for it. Also, there is a time that we keep and a time that we throw the thing away.
- Solomon has observed tearing and mending and has written much in Proverbs about the next pair. In Proverbs, he connects knowing when to speak and when not to speak (Pr. 10:19; 13:3; 16:24; 17:27; 21:23; 25:11 and especially 15:23).
- Finally, this poetic discourse ends with two strong personal and social emotions: love and hate, and war and peace. Again, these represent part of the spectrum of human activity under the sun. Human beings' activities are full of attraction toward things and repulsion from them. Their activities show that they love and that they hate. They lust and battle (James 4); and they search, work for, and experience peace.

- K&D have noted that, in general, all happens when and how God wills, according to a world-plan, comprehending all things which man can neither wholly understand, nor in any respect change,—feeling himself in all things dependent on God, he ought to learn to fear Him. We find these things true in the next and final portions of Section II.

#### **H. Man knows eternity, but not fully, and this is frustrating 3:9-13**

**Verse 9 What advantage has the one who toils from all of his toiling? Verse 10 I saw the occupation that God gave to the sons of men to occupy him. Verse 11 He, [God], has made all things appropriate in its time, moreover, he gave eternity in the heart of them, yet man cannot find with an objective to obtaining the work that God did from the beginning to as far as the end.**

- Qohelet returns to his original argument of Eccl. 1:3: “What profit has a man from all his toil under the sun?” All of man’s works are controlled by God, who, in fact, is the only being who knows the ultimate end of the work. Man can try to content himself with the fact that God makes all things happen at the appropriate time. Rom 8 has taught us that all things work together for good for those who love God and are the called according to His purpose. Yet, from all of man’s toilsome labors, there comes forth nothing that carries with it the security of its continuance; but in all he does man is conditioned by the change of times and circumstances and relations over which he has no control (K&D).
- Moses said that the revealed things belong to man, but the secret things, such as the ultimate end of all, belongs to God (Deut 29:29). The man in covenant with God, through Jesus Christ, can truly know all things (1 Cor. 2:13-16). He desires to not only know the temporal, but also how that which he does in the temporal fits into the eternal scheme of things. But this no one can know. The unregenerate man has no desire to pursue this knowledge.
- To reiterate, we do know that God decrees all of man’s works, and yet, he ordains the works of men at their appointed time. All of these works manifest themselves at appointed time. This sense confirms that God appoints all things in their time—this is descriptive of events and not prescriptive. All things are appointed in their time; not beautiful. The Hebrew word here is sometimes translated as “beautiful” only when describing something. As a stand alone noun, this word means, “appointed.” God has appointed all things in their time.
- K&D has said that the author in this portion of Eccl. means to say that God has not only assigned to each individually his appointed place in history (Acts 17), thereby bringing to the consciousness of man the fact of his being conditioned, but that He has also established in man an impulse leading him beyond that which is temporal toward the eternal: it lies in his nature not to be contented with the temporal, but to break through the limits which draws around him, to escape from the bondage and the disquietude within which he is held, and amid the ceaseless changes of time to

console himself by directing his thoughts to eternity. Every man knows God: the unregenerate suppresses this knowledge in unrighteousness and the regenerate man acknowledges the one true God (Rom 1). Man wants to know because of his being made in God's image, but only a Christian man can know truly, yet, even he cannot know all: God won't reveal all things to him. God placed eternity in the heart of man, yet a man cannot know the ultimate end of all with which he occupies himself.

### **I. Resolve 2: Every man should enjoy the life God has given him 3:12-13**

<sup>Verse 12</sup> **I know that there is nothing better for them than if they were to be happy and to do good in their lives;** <sup>Verse 13</sup> **and, also, that every man should eat, should drink, and should see good in all his toil—this is the gift of God.**

- Given this finiteness of knowledge that man possesses from God, and given the eternity that God has placed within man's heart, Solomon resolves to express the terms that reflect his coping mechanism regarding the frustration of frustrations; life under the sun. As stated earlier, man should be happy and busy doing that which is morally good. Man, while doing good, in the fear of God, should be eating, drinking, and should purpose to see the good in all of his toil. To be aware of this and to do this is evidence that God has gifted the man to be epistemologically aware.

*Wave of frustration 3: 3:14-3:21 and resolve 3:22*

### **J. Again, God decrees and governs all things so that men may fear his unchangeable decree 3:14-15**

<sup>Verse 14</sup> **I know that all that God does will be forever—nothing can be added to it and nothing can be diminished from it. God does this that men will fear His face.** <sup>Verse 15</sup> **Whatever is, was already; and that which will be, was already; and God makes the same things happen over and over again.**

- Note the wisdom of God described by Paul the Apostle in Romans 11:33-36. It is God's wise decree that stands forever and it is that holy counsel that orders the affairs of man. We should note that in Eccl. 1:15 and Eccl. 7:13-15, the decree of God is unchangeable. Man has no control of his destiny, has only a partial knowledge of reality, and is resigned to toiling all the days of his frustrating life. Yet, Qohelet says that he should eat, drink, be merry, and do good, while fearing God for His marvelous Providence (governing and preserving of all creation).
- We end this section with a well-driven nail (eat, drink, do good, and be merry) into the goad of the frustrating nature of life under the sun. We rejoice in these pleasurable, yet simple works of life. We recognize our finiteness before an infinite God. He would have us fear Him. God spoke to Moses, "By those who come near Me, I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people, I must be glorified." (Lev. 10:3)

- We conclude this section by revealing that God does the same thing over and over again throughout His linear history. This speaks of God's causing nothing new to happen under the sun. All is vanity under the sun. God ordains all things under the sun. Man cannot know all that God is doing, but he can know that God causes the same things to happen over and over again. This is the subjection to which God has subjected the creation. How can one cope with this? Eat, drink, do good, be merry, and fear God. Man is to find good in all of his toil that God has ordained him to do. We accomplish this rejoicing with an attitude of hope—hope for an eternity in the presence of God. This is not a new teaching, for all that we do is to be done for the glory of God and in a manner that will enable us to enjoy Him forever.

### **K. God's righteous judgement comes at His appointed time 3:16-17**

**Verse 16 And yet I saw under the sun, in the place of the judgment there was wickedness, and in the place of righteous judgment there was wickedness. Verse 17 I, even I, thought within my heart that God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every affair (matter) and for every deed.**

- Qohelet begins a new topic here and is obviously very curt. In the place of judgement, wickedness. In the place of righteousness, wickedness. This Hebrew poetic structure (parallelism) is designed to elicit moral outrage.
- This situation should not be. Under the sun there is many times confusion between guilt and innocence. The innocent should be declared so and the wicked should be declared guilty. However, this is not always the case. This is a goad and an extremely frustrating and a personal, familial, and societal misery. Examples are the unjust judge who takes bribes, the sinful teacher, the child-molesting priest, and the bad cop, to name a few.
- Qohelet speaks of what he saw, although he doesn't remedy it as king. Moreover, he seems to leave us with the fact that this cannot be remedied. Note his consolation in Eccl 5:8-9. Wicked governments check one another, and the king and the people must eat of the land. Oppression doesn't go on forever.
- In the midst of this frustration, God will make it right at the appropriate time. Qohelet reveals his resolve for this horrid turn of events and confidently (from his heart) acknowledges God's knowledge and righteous judgment of all mankind: the righteous and the wicked (Ps. 14:5). These words connect this section with Chapter 3:1 revealing the truth that there is an appropriate time for every activity under the sun. The Hebrew wording here depicts that God's ordained judgment will take place in human history and in the created world. God, in this life under the sun and at the appropriate time, will render His righteous judgment. We have seen this truth manifested throughout human history. This appointed time may be the final Day of Judgment. Nonetheless, we can expect this reflection of Qohelet to be true and that this is a hopeful expectation if we find ourselves being oppressed by the unrighteous. Pithy: What goes around comes around.

- K&D: *God will judge the innocent and the guilty; it shall be done some time, although not so soon as one might wish it, and think necessary, for God has for every undertaking and for every work its fixed time, also its judicial decision (Ps.75:3); He permits wickedness, lets it develop itself, waits long before He interposes.*

#### **L. Under the sun, man dies just as the beast 3:18-21**

**Verse 18 I deeply considered the condition of the sons of men, that God proves them, that they may see that they are, in reference to themselves like beasts. Verse 19 [God's] providential end [under the sun] regarding man is the same as that toward the beasts: as one dies so does the other, [for] they all have the same breath, for the man has no advantage over the beast, for all is frustrating. Verse 20 All are going to the same place, all come from the dust and all are returning to the dust. Verse 21 Who knows whether the spirit of the sons of man rise upward, and if the spirit of the beast goes downward into the earth?**

- Qohelet thinks man's frustration through to its ultimate end under the sun. That end is death. All of creation has been subjected to death, and all created beings will go to the great graveyard. Hence, all created beings have the same end, whether man or beast--death (Ps 49:12, 20; 73:22). Death rendered no advantage to the wise man over the fool (Eccl. 2:16).
- God proves men, sifts them, purifies them, test them to see, as Luther says, that they, among themselves, are like the beasts of creation. The beasts are powerless to know their end or what will happen after them. So is that condition of man which Solomon is pondering.
- God has rendered the sentence of death, due to the Adamic curse, upon all creation. This sentence is especially grievous to mankind since death cuts short his pursuit of dominion. Although the Christian man is frustrated, he has a hope of which the unbelieving man doesn't have--a hope of glory because he has not only been created in God's image, but he has also partaken of the new birth and is now a new creation.
- God uses death to enable men to see that they are like the animals with regard to ultimate end upon the earth. Many erroneously believe that ultimately we are animals. Qohelet doesn't seem to believe this.
- God's revelation reveals (Gen 3:19, Ps. 103:14) that all creation comes from dust and returns to dust; a point regarding death that Qohelet makes again in Eccl. 12:7 (Qohelet states that the spirit of men go upward, back to God). Perhaps, he is stating that animals at death dissolve into the earth to dust. In addition, this passage reveals that men, and especially beasts, cannot know what happens to them after their death. He doesn't even know what happens to his spirit, although Qohelet seems to set up a distinction between the breath of a man and that of a beast.

- Tying this section with the previous we find that God will execute justice in his time and that that time could be on the Last Day. However, in contemplating man's condition under the sun, it seems that all men die like the beasts. Furthermore, no one can know what will happen after this death. Remember, Solomon believed in a resurrection of the dead (from the Psalms of David) and a judgment and warned men to fear God because of it (Eccl. 11:9). He wants to explain that death is decisive under the sun and no one knows what will happen after it. No one can know when it will come, nor can anyone control it. It is in God's masterful and glorious hands.

### **M. Resolve 3: Rejoice in your works, for they are your portion from God 3:22**

**Verse 22** **So I saw that there is nothing better than that the man rejoice in his works, for that is his portion. [For] who can bring him to see what will happen after him?**

- The resolve for the frustrations revealed from 3:16 to 3:21 is that a man rejoice in his works like a father rejoices in an obedient son (Pr. 15:20). He should find the joy of the occupation of his hands, which includes, as stated before, work, family, social, and ecclesiastical works.
- This is not a statement of denial, but one of sober resolve in the midst of a world over which God is sovereign and man has no ultimate control. Not only is death out of man's control, but that which will come after his death is out of his control. The resolve is then to rejoice in all that occupies one's hands. Jesus, the One wiser than Solomon, spoke similar words in Matt. 6:25-31. He instructs his disciples to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness in the midst of a world filled with either the fear of hunger, thirst, nakedness, uncertainty, or with the real thing. The disciples were told that Gentiles spend their lives worrying about eluding these things, but that they were to have an enduring faith in God and to not make mammon their sole pursuit as the Gentiles. The Kingdom of God was to be their pursuit, for they could not, by worrying, even add one inch to their stature, let alone gain exclusive control of their earthly circumstances to avoid enduring tribulation.
- Since man can't control his own life and death, and since he cannot control what will occur after him (see Eccl. 6:12), Qohelet helps him resolve his frustration: rejoice in your own works, for this is your portion of life's pie from the Lord. Your life is the slice God has dealt to you. Work diligently and wisely with your hands and find joy in your labors, for this is all you get here and now.

### ***Excursis 2: The death of death in the death of Christ and the abundant life to those in Christ***

- The hope of the Israelite was that they would be saved according to the promise of the prophets, "all who call upon the name of Yahweh will be saved." Joel 2:28-32
- Although death is the horrific blow of sin under the sun (seconded only by the eternal judgment), death had no power over the covenant people. They trusted that Yahweh

would save them from the power of sheol (Ps. 16:10). They believed in an afterlife of glory where they would be in communion with Yahweh and their father Abraham.

- This promised brought hope to the covenant child in this life of frustration, which culminates in death. This hope was brought to fruition in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Ti. 2:10). Christ has destroyed him who had the power of death—the devil—and set God’s covenant people free from the fear of death that held them in bondage (Heb 2:14).
- Redemptively speaking, by God’s just sentence and decree, death and frustration entered the earth and subdued all mankind and creation through Adam, and by God’s grace, righteousness, the justification of life—eternal life—came through Jesus Christ, the second and last Adam (Rom. 5:12-20).
- As Christians, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, we are not slaves of sin nor of the frustration of frustrations: life under the sun. As the Reverend Charlie Dennison wrote in a 1998 email: “I’m not a slave of this world”. The Christian sees and has entered the Kingdom of God. He sees more than time and the finite elements of this world. He sees God’s eternal and glorious realm. He sees more than that which is in this life. As we live in Christ, we live in a realm of life, seated with Christ in heavenly places. We live in the midst of this frustration while filled with the hope of glory, the hope of being present with the Lord. We have this hope and, by virtue of Eccl., we have the ethical resolve for this life: Enjoy your life, your wife, your children; labor diligently and joyfully in your occupations; live in the fear of God, keep His commandments; for this is the whole of man. Therefore, to live is Christ and to die is gain. The frustration of death, although a certain truth under the sun, has no sting to him who is in Christ and is destined for glory when this life is over. Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this.” (Jn. 11:25-26) Comfort one another with these words.

*Wave of frustration 4: 4:1-5:17 and resolve 5:18-20*

**N. Never being born has advantage over a oppressive existence 4:1-3**

**Chapter 4 Verse 1 Then, I returned [to my contemplation (vs. resolve of 3:22)] and I saw all of the oppression being accomplished under the sun. And behold, the tear of the oppressed and there was no one consoling them, power was on the side of the oppressor, and there was no one consoling. Verse 2 And I praised the dead who already had died more than the living who are still alive. Verse 3 But better than both of them is he who has not been, [he] who has not seen the misery accomplished under the sun.**

- Still contemplating man’s works under the majesty and the incomprehensibility of God’s works, Qohelet views the works of and results of the oppressor. Jesus said that the Gentiles endeavor to lord it over one another (Luke 22:24-28). In this life, many are oppressed and there is no resolve for their oppression. Solomon, although a king, is acknowledging this event of oppression. He cannot resolve this situation outside of



his own kingdom. Perhaps, there was oppression even in his own districts, however, he is making a general observation of a situation under the sun. Many see Solomon as an instigator of oppression even in his own land (1 Ki. 11). He placed many burdens on the people, more specifically high taxes.

- Solomon has spoken, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked *man* rules, the people groan;” Due to Mordecai, “And in every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning of the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.” (Pr.29:2; Est 4:3) We remember that there is a judgment in favor of justice in God’s appointed time. K&D remark that in view of the sorrow which men bring upon their fellow-men, life for Qohelet lost all its worth and attraction.
- The great misery presented here is that there is no relief for the mourning of the oppressed. We do know, however, that God hears the cries of the oppressed as he heard the cries of his children in Egypt. He would desire that they call upon His name, repent of their sins, fear Him, and give Him glory. We see here the horrid, astounding misery of being left under the sun under the hand of an oppressor.
- Verse 2 is the first example of a better than proverb. It teaches that, on the whole, the one who has died is better than the one who is still enduring life under the sun. Qohelet praises the dead because their misery is done, and they are resting in eternity.
- Qohelet isn’t suicidal. He has no death wish. He simply praises the estate of the dead, moreover he praises the estate of the one who has never been born. Many in Scripture had the wish of death, for which they were rebuked by God: Jonah (Jon. 4:3, 10-11); Elijah (1 Ki. 19:4, 5-9).
- Moreover, Qohelet believes that one having never seen the sun (not being born) is better than both he who has endured and died and the one who is continuing to endure oppression in the midst of the already frustrating events that happen to one who is alive. Qohelet further illustrates this point by saying in Eccl. 6:3 that if a man beget a hundred children and live a long life, but does not find joy in any of these works, then a miscarried child has a better estate than he. To be subdued by the frustration of this life is most miserable, hence Qohelet’s resolve that a stillborn child is better than one who has continual misery and who lacks joy while alive. Interestingly, both the school of Hillel and Shamai agreed that to never be born is better than being born and enduring the miseries of this life.
- The one not being born is freed from the ultimate frustration of life under the sun. We could agree that not being born at all is better than enduring a life in a frustrated world in which we have little to no control over events. BUT, BUT, BUT, having the full revelation of not only Qohelet, but also that of the New Testament, we have hope for eternity and the resolve for life under the sun. The oppressed must fear God, keep His commands, and seek to enjoy the good in their works, for this is their lot under the sun.

## O. Being content is better than frustration, envy, and idleness 4:4-6

<sup>Verse 4</sup> **And I, even I, saw that all labor and all skillful success [comes from] man's envy of his neighbor. Moreover, this is pointless and a chasing of the wind.** <sup>Verse 5</sup>  
**The fool clasps his hands in idleness and consumes himself.** <sup>Verse 6</sup> **Better is the full hand of the quiet attitude of contentment more than the full hands of toil which are longing for the wind.**

- The NGSB comments that envy and lack of contentment fuel the futile drive for earthly satisfaction. A man sees his neighbor's or friend's prosperity and, because of what his eyes see, his face turns a certain color as a result of deep emotion, zeal, jealousy, and rivalry. From this zealous heart of envy, the man labors and does so diligently and skillfully in order to secure that which is like, or that which is greater than, his neighbor's. The envious man labors skillfully and successfully to attain the status of his neighbor. There is no end to his pursuit. There is no definition of his purpose. He never asks why he's doing this to himself. This envy is without objective. Although he's busy in his pursuits, Solomon says that "a heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." Pr. 14:30
- Qohelet doesn't condemn the diligence of the envious man, he simply comments that his works are passionately successful, but without ultimate end. He lives and works to "keep up with the Jones'." This is a fleeting activity and as chasing the wind.
- More destructive than being pointless, this envy and skillful success is driven by covetousness, which, as Paul says, is idolatry (Col. 3:5).
- Matthew Henry: "If a man be acute, and dexterous, and successful in his business, he gets the ill-will of his neighbors and the more for the reputation he has got by his honesty."
- In contrast to this flurry of successful activity, Qohelet speaks of the sloth, the lazy fool, who consumes his own estate because he won't lift his hand to work. Pr. 6:4-6: Note the ant you sluggard...How long will you slumber...When will you rise from your sleep...a little folding of the hands to sleep ...your poverty will come on you like a prowler and your need like an armed man. Qohelet is mocking the lazy, since they do not raise anything, they must eat their own flesh.
- Matthew Henry: "If a man be stupid and blundering in his business, he does ill for himself." Also, the sluggard envies the diligent man thinking that his little with idleness is better than abundance with honest labor.
- Qohelet speaks a proverb regarding the blessed estate of the satisfied and content soul. The words of Agur in Pr. 30:8 reflect this proverb well, "...Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God." The resolve here for both the one tempted to envy and to chase the wind in his occupation or to be slothful and to consume his estate is to labor diligently, enjoy the labor, and to be content with its fruits. "Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting (sacrificial meals) with strife." Pr. 17:1. Henry, "Let us by honest industry lay hold on the handful, that we may not want necessaries, but not grasp at both the hands full, which will but create us vexation of spirit. Moderate pains and moderate gains will do best."

- In this proverb, which exalts quiet contentment over meaningless toil to keep up with the neighbors, Qohelet would have us to not envy our neighbors and chase the wind trying to build an estate the same size as or greater than they. Be content and satisfied with those things which you have with great joy (1 Ti. 6:6-10, 17-19). Since the eyes are never satisfied, the uncontrolled soul will never allow them to be satisfied with the good that is in hand. The soul will always long for more. That soul will always chase after the wind. May we be diligent and not slothful, and may we be content in no matter what circumstance God places us.

## **P. The lonely sinner's occupation is especially futile 4:7-8**

**Verse 7 And again I saw frustration under the sun. Verse 8 There was a man all alone, moreover he had no son or brother. And there was no end to all of his troublesome labor, yet his eyes were not content with wealth. [He asks] for whom and I toiling and depriving myself of enjoyment? This also is frustrating and an occupation of misery.**

- Longman notes that Qohelet begins his anecdotes that will characterize his style throughout the rest of the book. Since these anecdotes are nameless, they lend themselves to application (hey, I know someone like that), including self application (hey, that's me).
- As a man toils under the sun, there is nothing worse than being alone and not knowing it. The lonely man, without children or brother (covenantal or familial—the two closest male companions under the sun), toils for himself, epistemologically unaware of the end, or ultimate objective of his tasks or of the heirs of his endless labor. Perhaps, like today, the cost of a family is too high in his mind.
- This lonely one is driven, by the decree of God, to pursue riches without ever being content. The Apostle Paul (1Ti. 6:6-10, 17-19) states that this one will fall into temptation and a snare, drown in harmful lusts, pierce himself through with great sorrow, and, perhaps, be condemned, for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. We should remember Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Lk. 11:13-21).
- We say that he is blinded with respect to reflection upon his occupation because he doesn't stop to consider for whom am I toiling and for whom am I depriving myself of enjoying the fruits of my labor. See Ps. 39:6. He never stops to eat, drink, and be merry with all that God has given him. He takes no wife nor prepares any heirs.
- The fruit of his labor will be given to another when he dies, and that alone. Looking at this situation of a man, one can judge that this is a wholly frustrating occupation of misery.

## **P. Companionship has great advantage over being alone 4:9-12**

**Verse 9 Better are two than one for there is for them a good return for their labor.**

**Verse 10 For if they fall, one of them can raise up his friend, but woe to the one, who when he falls, has no other to help him. Verse 11 Moreover, if two lie down, they shall be warmed, but how can one keep warm? Verse 12 And thought they may overpower the one, two can stand against [this force], and a triple-braided cord is not quickly torn apart.**

- Gen 2:18 states that it is not good for a man to be alone. So, the resolve for this misery of lonely, pointless occupation is to work with a companion. The sense of this verse can certainly include the companionship of a wife, however, the sense cannot be entirely that of a wife. Two occupying themselves together in business, corporately vs. a sole proprietorship, receive a greater return for their labor. Of course, there are greater risks with more companions in business, however, the return

can most certainly outweigh the risks. The key here is that companionship is better than isolation. The profit from two is the reward for faithful fellowship.

- The business companion can: succor his partner in illness or in weakness. Solomon emphasizes the pity and woe that is directed toward the one who falls or stumbles while working or walking alone. Matthew Henry speaks of Rome's comments about the ancient Britons during warfare: "While they fight in detached parties, they sacrifice the general cause." The Britons fell while working in a disintegrated manner. Companionship is important in times of adversity.
- Two working together can keep one another warm when they sleep (sharing body heat), but the lone worker who sleeps cannot keep warm by himself.
- Two walking together are a deterrent to the attacking malefactor, but one by himself is an easy target. This was an important warning for the Near Eastern traveler. Moreover, Qohelet emphasizes (Pual case) that companions grouped in more than twos, e.g. in a formation of three, are nearly impossible to break. The Targum interprets this verse, "if two righteous people in a generation are useful, how much more useful are three righteous people in a generation."

#### **R. Great popularity is fleeting at best 4:13-16**

**Verse 13 Better is a poor, but wise, youth, more than an old, but stupid and dull, king who will not be admonished any longer. Verse 14 For this youth came from the prison house to be king, moreover he was born in want in the king's kingdom. Verse 15 I saw all of those living and walking under the sun following [this] second youth who succeeded [the king]. Verse 16 There was no end to the people who stood before him, but those people who came later were not pleased with him, indeed this also is frustrating and chasing the wind.**

- Solomon had attained greatness and made all of his works great (Eccl. 1:16; 2:4). He declares a better than proverb that a wise youth is better than a fool king, and that popularity among a discontented people is fleeting.
- First, a wise youth (a very unusual circumstance in the Near East) is better than a foolish king who believes that he knows all, although he deceives himself. Kings are usually the wise whereas the youth are usually the fools. Many commentators say that Solomon speaks of himself as the fool since he sinned greatly against God due to his lusts for horses, women, and gold. I believe this is more of an observation of Solomon's vs. a confession of his own estate.
- The king is said to be a fool because he no longer listens to counsel and reproof. The Scriptures are profitable for this purpose. Pr. 11:14: For a lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisors make victory sure. See Pr. 15:22; 20:18; and 24:6. Ignoring advice, especially as a king, is foolish, dangerous, and shows contempt for one's own life and the lives over whom he rules.
- Secondly, a strange event: a youth is exalted from prison (perhaps debtors prison) and want to the position of ruler over all the land after the death of the foolish king. Matthew Henry says, "wisdom and virtue will gain men honour even under the disadvantages of youth and poverty." I connected the pronouns in this section to their

antecedents for clarification. All people followed the youth. In short, from humble origins, a youth comes to supplant the king.

- Third, the people (or, perhaps generation) that followed those who lauded the youthful king, had little to no regard for the wondrous work of Providence in exalting this wise youth to royalty. We see this in the life of Joseph, and, according to Henry in the life of Christ. One day the people cry, “Hosanna,” and the next day they cry, “Crucify Him.” Under the sun, one cannot seem to make anything, even appreciation for good, mighty, and wise works, last very long. To do so is as grasping for the wind. This verse reveals the limited life of wisdom—very short. Longman also notes that “political power is meaningless and like chasing wind, even political power attended by old age, wisdom, and popularity.”

### **S. Fear God and speak wisely before Him at all times 5:1-7**

Verse 17 (Chapter 5:1 in English) **Keep yourself when you go into the house of God and go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they are not aware that they are doing evil.** Chapter 5 Verse 1 **Do not be quick with your mouth and let not your heart be hasty to utter words before the face of God, for God is in the heavens and you are on the earth. Indeed, let your words be few.** Verse 2 **As the dreams come when there are many occupations/tasks, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.** Verse 3 **When you are vowing to God, do not delay to fulfill it, for [He] has no pleasure in fools; fulfill what you vow!** Verse 4 **Better to not vow more than making a vow and not fulfilling it.** Verse 5 **Don't let your mouth cause you to sin against your flesh. And do not protest to the temple messenger that your vow was an ignorant error. Why should God be wroth at your voice and should destroy the work of your hands?** Verse 6 **For many dreams and many words are without ultimate end, therefore, fear God.**

- Qohelet here exhorts and instructs the covenant community in this proverbial section regarding their works of worship before a holy and transcendent God. The House of God is no longer the temple in Jerusalem, but is now the access that the believer has to God in Christ. This setting can now also be understood as the vows and worship performed in the visible church. Nonetheless, his overarching warning here is that one guard their every step when approaching God in worship, and, more specifically, that one not multiply their words and speak presumptuously before God. The wise man will heed this instruction, but the fool will, in a headstrong manner, speak much and carelessly vow before God, thereby offering the sacrifice of fools. The fool will incur God's judgment. Qohelet warns all to fear God.
- God has ordained His way of acceptable works of worship. The Reformed church has always referred to this as the regulative principle: Man worships God only in the manner in which He has commanded (See WCF XXI). Hence Qohelet describes the man as a fool who does not pay careful heed to His instructions. This foolish disregard in one's works of worship is idolatry and solicits the wrath of God. Saul's kingship was taken away because he didn't obey the Word of God in the sacrifice and judgment of Agag of the Amalekites. The judgment of God is in 1 Sam. 15:21: “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed [the Word of God] is better than the fat of

rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (divination), and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” Saul offered the sacrifice of a fool before God when he disobeyed God’s command regarding acceptable works of worship.

- The wicked and foolish are blind to the truth and do those works that displease God. The fool thinks that his worshipful works are acceptable before God. Knobel states that the wicked do not concern themselves with the right mode of worshipping God—so that they do evil. He does not know that he does err and does anger God with the imaginations of his mind (Pr. 15:8-9; 21:27). The Targum states that the wicked have no moral feeling, and act not from moral motives.
- The fool vents all his feelings and chatters on (Pr. 29:11), but a wise man restrains his words and feelings. See Eccl. 10:14. K&D note that the Germans say regarding the prattling of the fool: *auf flugeln fliegen* [to flee on wings]; *auf Einem Auge nicht sehen* [not to see with one eye]; *auf der Flute blasen* [to blow on the flute]; or in English, the word goes forth without the thought.
- To help us guard ourselves from the works of a fool, Qohelet warns us to place a guard over our lips and to not utter anything hastily before God. The reason is that He is the transcendent Potter and we, His people, are insignificant clay. When man comes before God he should be silent and when he does speak, he should speak few words and not in a rash manner as the fool, for it is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, and afterward to reconsider his ways. In this manner, man guards his steps away from the sacrifice of fools. Fools are ignorant because they do not hear. They, therefore, do evil and do receive the consequence of their deeds from God.
- The rash words here refer to the words of a hasty vow from which one seeks escape. In verse 1 and verse 5 we see that a vow is made in a hasty manner in the presence of a temple servant, probably a priest, here translated as a messenger (cf. Mal. 2:7 priest as messenger [same word]). The fool seeks to persuade the priest that his vow was in error or in ignorance; however, the man must perform his vow even to his own hurt (Ps. 15:4). One seeks for the priest to understand his dilemma and to absolve him of his vow. Keep in mind that no one sins in not making a vow, however, when one vows, one must keep his vow. Num. 30:1-9 reveals the laws of vows. Since the vow is binding upon the soul, Qohelet is not warning believers in Yahweh to not vow, but is warning foolish and chatty believers to seriously consider their words before Yahweh (marriage vows, church membership vows, etc.). Note Jesus’ warnings about false oath taking in Matt. 6:7-8.
- Qohelet that finds the source of rash verbal behavior before God is a fertile mind from much activity resulting in dreams. Dreams, although an Old Testament medium for revelation (Daniel) and a first century revelatory medium (Acts 2:17), are not to be the source of determining God’s will or the source of rash vows before God. Many dreamers have led the people of God astray from Yahweh (Jer. 23:25-26). The Targum notes that dreams happen when men vex themselves by striving after high and remote ends beyond what is possible, or “in much project-making.” Longman interprets this passage as saying that too much meaningless toil leads to dreaming and then to the manifestation of a “loquacious speaker.” Henry notes that “many now perplex themselves with their frightful or odd dreams, as if they foreboded disaster. Those that heed dreams shall have a multitude of them; but in them all there are

divers vanities. Therefore never heed them; instead of repeating them [even to your spouses] lay no stress upon them, draw no disquieting conclusions from them, but fear thou God.” Longman correctly warns that just as dreams are completely out of touch with reality, so are the words of a fool before God, therefore, fear God, for it is the whole of man (Eccl. 12:13). This is the first time we see the phrase, “fear God,” in Qohelet’s Eccl., and it plays a pivotal role in the message of the Book.

- Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin! Watch your words before God. Those who fail to fulfill their vows sin against God and against their own estate (the fruit of the work of one’s hands). The man who sins thusly is referred to as a fool in whom the Lord has no pleasure. Pr. 20:25 is appropriate here: It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, and afterward to reconsider his vows. Therefore, we must fear God’s just anger and act accordingly. K&D: As the heavens, God’s throne, are exalted above the earth, the dwelling place of man, standing far beneath him; therefore ought the words of a man before God to be few—few, well chosen reverential words, in which one expresses his whole soul (vs. vain repetition like the hypocrites).

## **T. Oppressive and covetous governments are fleeting 5:7-8**

**Verse 7 If you see the oppression of the poor and the deprivation of justice and righteousness in the district, do not be taken back at it, for high official is keeping watch over high official and [there are] officials over them. Verse 8 And the profit of the land goes to all, even the king is served from the land.**

- Qohelet teaches us that oppression from governments are not long-lived. A recent example of this is that the Soviet Union lasted only a little over 70 years (1917-ca.1990). In view of this, Qohelet states that when one sees oppression of the poor and a poverty of justice and righteousness that one should not be bewildered, taken back, or dumbfounded with an element of fear. When one sees the darkness of oppression coming from the citadels from which righteousness and justice should come. Don’t be taken back says the Preacher.
- The reason for obeying Qohelet’s line about not being astounded is that God has established checks and balances to ensure that wicked rulers do not continue. God may let them last for a season, but they shall die the death when God has accomplished His purpose through them. Ps. 2 states that God laughs in heaven at the unjust rulers. Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and, according to Rev. 2, Christ will break these wicked rulers like an iron rod breaks pottery. Note David’s words in Ps. 37:35-40.
- One sense here as to why one should not be taken back with oppression is that higher rulers watch over lower rulers, and whether according to righteous motives or equally oppressive motives, the higher rulers check the wickedness of their lower counter parts. The same goes true for those rulers that are over the higher rulers. Eventually, the highest ruler of all is accountable to God Himself. Even in our own land, if the three branches of government are corrupt, then a more corrupt branch is checked by the others if that corrupt branch goes to far. God works all of these things for His glory. Hitzig says that wicked government members here watch out for each other to



deprive the people of justice stating that “one crow does not peck out the eyes of another.”

- K&D note that the Persians had cruel punishments for disagreeable rulers. Satraps fleeced the people, but if they got out of hand, then Inspectors could bring them up on charges. The Inspectors could issue fatal denunciations. Over all of these stood the king and/or his court filled with intrigue and oppression. All in all, they all kept each other in check against the worst sort of depravity. The covetousness of each level of Persian government was manifested in the way each level tried to do away with the other level. This type of behavior was prevalent prior to the fall of the empire.
- Rulers who do oppress their subjects, however, forget that they themselves are served from the work of their subjects hands from the fields. The king is served from the field. Therefore, oppression leads to ultimate chaos and collapse for the king and his kingdom. Deprivation of righteousness and justice leads to a breakdown of moral authority and to a final demise of the government (again Ps. 2).
- Perhaps God used the means of Solomon’s insatiable desire for women, horses, and gold to oppress the people with high taxes. This angered the people and caused them (all the tribes but Judah) to reject his son as ruler over them. The people seemed to perceive Solomon as oppressive. Covetousness is not becoming to a king because he will never have enough. He will act in an idolatrous manner toward wealth and oppress his people and other nations for it. All oppression and covetousness is without an ultimate objective. It is frustrating and self-consuming. It is fleeting at best.

#### **U. Profit is ultimately profitless: It is either lost or left 5:9-16**

**Verse 9 One who loves money never has enough money, and one loving wealth never has enough income. This also is frustrating. Verse 10 When goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit is there to the owners of these goods except that they feast their eyes [on it]. Verse 11 The sleep of the laboring one is sweet whether or not he eats much, but the satisfying abundance of the rich does not permit him to sleep. Verse 12 There is a sickening misery which I have seen under the sun, riches being hoarded by its owner to his own misery, Verse 13 or that this wealth vanishes through a miserable set of God-ordained circumstances and when he begets a son there is nothing left for [the boy]. Verse 14 Just as he comes naked out of his mother’s womb, he departs [this life] and returns while taking nothing in his hand. Verse 15 This is a grievous misery, as a man comes, so he departs. And what gain does he receive since he toils for the wind. Verse 16 Moreover, in all of his days he eats in the darkness vexed, incurably sick, and angry.**

- Closely tied to the oppression and injustice of governments is the covetous character of those who oppress. They take bribes to pervert justice because they love money. 1 Ti. 6:10 says, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil...” This verse provides a transition into the discussion of insatiable covetousness by all of mankind.
- 1 Ti. 6 warns those who desire to be rich about the multitude of sorrows they must prepare to face. Those who are greedy are insatiable. This passage is a proverb dealing with the frustrating nature of wealth. If one loves silver, he will never get

enough of it. Pr. 27:20 says that just as hell is never satisfied so the eyes of a man are never satisfied. He desires more. Kings were especially warned not to covet, or greatly multiply to themselves, gold (Deut. 17:17). Since satisfaction can never be achieved by the covetous, the drive to quench the satisfaction is futile and, here, is referred to as frustrating. As we read in Eccl. 4:6: better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with grasping for the wind.

- As a man's estate increases, so increases the number of mouths to feed from the estate (e.g., children, servants, advisors, consultants, friends, etc.). Hence the social proverb, "It takes money to make money." To continue to generate large amounts of income requires great expenditures of income (more consumers involved in the production process).
- Since the owner must meet his income producing expenses from the income he produces, then the greatest joy he may have is to simply see the greatness of his wealth on paper or in physical assets. He doesn't get to spend it all on himself. He watches it grow up and be spent. That is his portion under the sun.
- Moreover, because the rich must manage this vast estate of resources and keep it flourishing, they may lose sleep over fluctuations in the capital markets, drops in consumer demand for their products/services, increase in the number of competitors, oppressive fiscal policy from governments, and/or the threat posed by thieves and robbers who target the estate. This pursuit of riches and maintenance of the same, although satisfying the eye and the soul, can rob one of sleep, for there is the threat of the fulfillment of the proverb that wealth makes like wings and flits away. We note a similar incident with Job. He lost nearly all, yet he says that the thing which I feared most has come upon me. He obviously feared given his great financial estate. However, we must make sure that the financial failure being spoken of here has no insinuation that the wealthy person sinned.
- The laboring one, who is not poor, yet who is not rich, has a simple estate that doesn't rob him of sleep. Keep in mind that there are poor, covetous people who worry all the time and do lose sleep because they are over extended with debt and do covet what the rich have. Remember, it this type of envy that causes them to labor harder and more skillfully. What vanity! Ps 127:2: It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep. This is the sweet sleep that comes from a godly, diligent, and contented soul who trusts God for his provision and for the preservation of his estate.
- Qohelet continues his discourse regarding wealth and riches by describing a situation that is so vexing, so frustrating even to the point of anger, that it causes one to sink into deep misery. A man greedily hoards wealth to his own detriment or to his own harm or to his own misery, or, after having hoarded it to leave to his son, he loses it by virtue of bad business circumstances. This is a frustration of all frustrations because everything that was ever desired and even seen vanishes before its intended end. Worse yet, the man lives to see it happen.
- To ward off this most miserable event, Solomon has spoken before that Yahweh loves and blesses the generous soul (Pr. 21:26; 28:20). Paul echoes this sentiment in 2 Cor. 9:6-11 and goes on to say 1 Ti. 6:17-18 that the rich should not set their hearts on uncertain riches or place their trust in them, but that they should trust in the living God who gives to all richly to enjoy. Every man, who is wise, seeks to build up his

estate and to leave an inheritance to his children (Pr. 13:22). Note the WSC Questions 74 and 75:

- 74. What is required in the eighth commandment?
  - A. The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.
  
- 75. What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?
  - A. The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth, or may, un- justly hinder our own, or our neighbor's, wealth or outward estate.
- But if the acquisition and distribution of wealth is the man's sole endeavor, then he may, repeat may, be sorely surprised as our miserable man described here by Qohelet. We also see this grievous situation in the gospel with the foolish rich man whose soul was required of him when he had attained his financial freedom (Lk. 12:20). The heir of the man is left with nothing. Solomon knows that the generous man, and not the covetous, will be a blessing and will be blessed in the end (Pr. 24-26).
- This passage ends with Qohelet revealing that death cuts short all endeavors. This final enemy takes a man out of the land of the living. Man comes into this world naked and helpless and he leaves this world in the same manner. He departs this world to his Maker. And of all that a man collects, builds, gathers, assembles in his occupation under the sun, he can take nothing with him. Realistically and analytically man gains nothing from all of his labors under the sun of which he may take with him over and above that with which he came. He came naked, he leaves naked (Job's conclusion Job 1:21+1 Ti. 6:7). There is no gain for living, no gain for his toil.
- He toils through this life vexed, miserable, and angry, and to top it off, he dies and can take nothing with him. The man figuratively eats in darkness (cf. Mic. 7:8). K&D note that this is an expression for a faithless and gloomy life. All throughout this man's life he ate the bread of sorrow, or prison fare; he did not allow himself pleasant table comforts in a room comfortably or splendidly lighted. K&D add that he who by his labor and care aims at becoming rich, will not only lay upon himself unnecessary privations, but also have many sorrows; for many of his plans fail, and the greater success of others awakens his envy, and neither he himself nor others satisfy him; he is morbidly disposed, and as he is diseased in mind, so also in body, and his constantly increasing dissatisfaction becomes at last, anger, he grumbles at himself, at God, and all the world. From observing such persons, Paul says of them, "they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Ti. 6)."
- Life under the sun is evanescent. Those who strive for meaning in wealth are reaching for a hopeless goal. Our lives are a mere profitless poof under the sun. So, again, how do we resolve this frustration, yea, this very real frustration?

## V. Resolve/Well-driven Nail 3: It is the gift of God to eat, drink, and enjoy the fruit of your works 5:17-19

<sup>Verse 17</sup> **Behold, then I, even I, realized that it is good and appropriate to eat and to drink and to see happy fulfillment in all of one's labor that he toils under the sun [during] the numbered days of his life that God gives him, for this is one's portion.**

<sup>Verse 18</sup> **Moreover, any man whom God gives riches and treasures and causes him to eat of it, master over his lot, and enjoy his work; this is the gift of God.** <sup>Verse 19</sup> **He seldom reflects on the days of his life for God is occupying his heart with gladness.**

- For the man possessing wealth and riches, Qohelet counsels from his research, just as he has done before in this book, that he should enjoy his lot from the Lord. The rich man should be eating, and drinking, seeing good, and being fulfilled in all of his labors, although they be frustrating and though his days are numbered (some here imply “few”). This behavior on the part of both the poor, but here especially the wealthy, is lawful, good, and most appropriate. This is God's order for the wealthy man. Furthermore, it is God's gift to them
- Qohelet wants to point out that this gift of enjoying the wealth given to one is from God, the Father of lights, who richly gives to each one to enjoy. Remember, what is the chief end of man? To glorify Him and *to enjoy* Him forever.
- Not everyone who has wealth has the power to enjoy it. Qohelet will have more to say about this in Chapter 6. The gift in this passage is defined as when God causes a rich man to enjoy his wealth from the heart. God causes a man to master over his labors and to thoroughly enjoy his skills and the fruit they produce. God so causes a man to see the good in his toil that the man is never preoccupied with the fleeting nature of life, the frailty of his rich estate, or the fact that he will die and leave it all to another. God busies the man's heart with gladness from his occupation. This is truly a gift from God above; therefore, it is most appropriate and good that the wealthy enjoy their goods from the Lord.
- We must note also that God expects that the wealthy brethren are to be humble, willing to share, and zealous for charitable works (1 Ti. 6). As John David Rockefeller taught his children, “With opportunity comes obligation.” This obligation requires the wealthy man to excel in his occupations and to consider promoting the prosperity of the estates of others. The wicked, of course, are blind to the fact that they and their estates are accountable before God. Their attitude is that of 1 Cor. 15:32, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” See the same in Is. 22:13.
- Examining the exhortation from Qohelet of eating, drinking, and merry making under the Lordship of God and living sober, quiet lives (Titus 2; 1 Thess. 4:11; 5:6) under the Lordship of Christ, we find no tension. One's life under the sun is not to be made up of folly, or careless frivolity, or of not taking life seriously. The New Testament writings warn Christians to live sober, quiet lives with the hope of glory, and in light of the appearance of Christ in AD 70. Particularly grave circumstances surrounded the church in the first century. Qohelet is giving us a pattern of behavior for all times. That regardless of the frustrations that abound, find the joy and blessing of God in the portion which you have been given. Do not let love, joy, and peace grow cold, even in the midst of great tribulation. Jesus said that because of lawlessness the love of

many will wax cold (Matt. 24). The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. This coincides with Qohelet's philosophical suggestion to eat, drink, and find joy in your occupations, but do so under the accountability of God. His ultimate conclusion is to fear God and to keep His commands. This is in whole-hearted agreement with later revelation from the Son of God, Himself.

#### **W. God gives one the power to enjoy the fruits of his toil 6:1-6**

**Chapter 6 Verse 1 There is a misery that I saw under the sun and it is a heavy burden on mankind. Verse 2 The man whom God gives riches, treasures, and honor so that his soul has no need of anything he desires, but causes him not to master over it with enjoyment, but a foreigner enjoys it. This is meaningless and a sickening misery. Verse 3 If a man begets one hundred children and lives many years, no matter how long he lives, if he is not satisfied with good from his prosperity and, moreover, he does not receive a proper burial, I say better is a miscarried child than he. Verse 4 Indeed [the miscarried child] comes in frustration and in darkness and he departs in the darkness, his name is covered. Verse 5 Though he never saw the sun and never knew rest, he is better than that man. Verse 6 Even if that man lives a thousand years twice, but does not enjoy his prosperity. Are not all going to the same place?**

- Still discoursing about wealth and its lack of advantage, Qohelet describes now a most miserable plight of mankind: man who has all of his heart's desire regarding the good things of this life, yet has not been blessed by the Most Sovereign God to enjoy it from the heart. God gives this man riches, possessions, and honor among men. The man has all of this to his heart's content and wants or longs for nothing else. Much like the rich man in Lk. 12:20. Qohelet has previously counseled one in this condition to purpose to enjoy that which has been given from God. This situation, however, has a decreed twist in that God, who caused the rich man to enjoy the fruits of his labor in the previous passage, does not permit this man to enjoy the fruits of his toil.
- This troublesome lot can be manifested in terms of the man's not enjoying what he has while he lives, or in terms of his untimely death wherein he is not permitted to enjoy that which he has collected. Nonetheless, the wealthy man has not been given the mastery over his goods to enjoy them with satisfaction. Moreover, the man's wealth, possessions, and honor are given into the hands of a foreigner, or alien, one who is not even among the covenant community. He builds up a great estate, doesn't find any joy in it all, then passively passes it to a foreigner—not to a son nor to a brother.
- Qohelet is particularly grieved at this situation. He calls it not only a frustration, but also a sickening misery. He knows what it is like to build and pursue greatness in all he does. He knows that he will pass it all to his son, Rehoboam. He does not know what will become of all he has once he dies. Solomon knows that he must enjoy the good of his labor, but he goes on to state here that there is no situation that is worse than this man who can find no joy in his prosperity, in his lot from God. He comments that this man, who cannot enjoy his wealth and who will not receive an

honorable burial (since he is a man of honor) (See also Deut. 28:26; 2 Ki.9:10; Jer. 14:16), is better off never being born.

- Qohelet draws this man's situation out to the full and states that even if he, a wealthy and honorable man, were to father 100 children, and if he were to live a long life, then if he can not be satisfied with his pleasant portion, and furthermore if he were not to receive an honorable burial, it would then be better for him to have never been born. He becomes wealthy and honored, yet he is forever miserable and then leaves this world naked and dishonored. Why live?
- K&D remark that Artaxerxes Ochus' body was thrown to the cats. Jezebel's body was thrown to the ground and eaten by the dogs. This is all dishonorable. By reason of honor and the knowledge of eternal life and glory, the Christians have always sought to honor the body and remembrance of their dead. K&D also say that Elster rightly remarks that an honorable burial and an honorable remembrance, God's good hand (I put this here vs. Elster's good fortune), albeit shaded with sadness, might be seen.
- If we were to examine just life under the sun, then a stillborn child, or miscarried child is better off than to be as this man. The miscarried child is never born. It is waited for, longed for, prepared for, and then it doesn't come. The child dies. His name is shrouded, or never known. The child never saw the sun, never knew frustration and toil, and never knew the sweetness of rest after vigorous labor. A miscarriage is an event of tremendous, gut-wrenching frustration. It is a most sickening misery. Solomon doesn't sugarcoat this and neither should we. That is why Solomon compares the man who can find no joy in a good life to this miscarried child.
- If the man, to whom God has given all that can be desired in this life, has not the God-given gift of enjoying this goodness, his life is pointless and most frustrating, even if the man were to continue in this state for 2000 years (older than any human). We must rely upon God to both glorify Him in this life and to enjoy Him and the portion he has given us in this life, no matter what that portion is. K&D: "Better, certainly, is no life than a joyless life, and, moreover, one ending dishonourably.
- Solomon concludes this section by declaring that all men shall see death—the great, the honored, and the stillborn child. Wealth and honor are fleeting. They are not present at birth and they cannot remain with a man at death.

**X. But, you will not escape the frustration to which God has subjected all creation 6:7-12**

<sup>Verse 7</sup> **All of man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his soul is never satisfied.** <sup>Verse 8</sup>  
**Indeed, what advantage does a wise man have over a fool? What is it to a poor man that he knows how to conduct himself before the living?** <sup>Verse 9</sup> **Better is the sight of the eyes than the roving appetite. Moreover, this is a meaningless chasing after the wind.** <sup>Verse 10</sup> **Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with him who is stronger than he,** <sup>Verse 11</sup> **for the making of many words is meaningless, what profit is it to the man.** <sup>Verse 12</sup> **For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the numbered days of his frustrating/pointless life which he passes through like the shadow? Who can tell him what will happen after he is gone?**

- This is the conclusion to what I believe represents the first half of the book. I also see this passage as the end of the second major section of the book. In review, section I. was the thesis section declaring that life under the sun is the ultimate frustration Ecc. 1:1-2. In it, Qohelet stated that God has decreed a cycle of futility under the sun. He also recorded several conclusions, which led to the book's theme of frustration (Eccl 1:3-11). Also in this section, Solomon declared that all men occupy themselves under the sun, and that he had occupied himself with the pursuit of ultimate meaning (Eccl 1:12-13). The second major section of the book analyzes man's occupation under the sun. Qohelet gives the covenant people of God the resolve that they should enjoy the good in their toils under the sun as they labor while being unsure of God's ultimate decree. Eccl. 1:14-3:15:
- This final passage of the first half of the book and the second major section is a summary of the major events and the resolve that has been stated with regard to life under the sun. This passage provides a bridge from Qohelet's conclusions regarding man's occupation under God and his next proposal (in the second half of the book and the third major section) that although man can't know what is ultimately the best course of action under the sun, wisdom is better than folly. Qohelet will end the book with his ultimate resolve for life under the sun.
- Qohelet begins by summarizing all of his thoughts regarding the endless toils of man, his pursuit of excellence because of envy of his neighbor, and the insatiability of his appetite. Man's labors under the sun are for mouth. Even retirement savings are for future consumption of some kind. We leave an inheritance so that our children can consume it. Pr. 16:26: the laborer's appetite works for him, his hunger drives him on. We work; we eat. There is never enough to stop the cycle of occupational labors, this contrary to the futile and unbiblical claims of socialism and communism.
- Qohelet has described the pursuit of wisdom as endless and frustrating. A man who obtains wisdom ultimately dies, as does the fool. So what advantage has the one with wisdom over the one who has it not. We will find that, at least temporarily speaking, wisdom has advantage under the sun. It enables a more enjoyable and easy life. Wisdom enables one to avoid continually stumbling through life. It enables one to fear and to know God and to enjoy Him forever. Wisdom saves the fool from his folly. But, ultimately, under the sun, because of death's cutting short one's life,

wisdom brings no advantage to the either the wise, or the rich, or the poor man for that matter. See Eccl. 2:12-16.

- Qohelet has spoken through several proverbs and anecdotes that quiet contentment will enable one to enjoy his God-given portion under the sun. He, as well as nearly every other inspired writer of the Bible, has inferred that those who pursue wealth and riches as an end, do grasp for that which is fleeting and transient at best. We have learned that slothful men cannot use these proverbs to justify their poverty and to displace their envy of the diligent rich with moralism. Qohelet, therefore, concludes that to enjoy a quiet life of contentment is better than chasing the wind.
- A roving appetite will never be satisfied. Submitting to the soul's unrestrained insatiability leads to frustration and misery. This unrestrained estate leaves one longing for greener pastures. Many commentators have used the following proverbs to provide the sense to verse 9, for example, "a bird in the hand, is worth two in the bush." Longman mentions that Luther spoke of the Aesop's Fable that describes a dog snatching at the meat in the mirror and thus losing the morsel in his mouth.
- Dorothy Gail (Wizard of Oz) wanted to find a place without trouble and frustration. She thought the place existed over the rainbow. Dorothy was idle, discontented, and a chatterbox. Dorothy's continual discontented chatter caused her to dream worthless dreams: the impetus, of course, for the movie. Dorothy needed to be occupied. However, Dorothy came to find out, with the help of Glenda the "good witch of the north," that Kansas, that which Dorothy had in her hand, was her adequate portion and that there was no place like home. To try to find that place, would be as grasping for the wind. There is no Oz, no Utopia (which means, "no place," in Greek), and no place on earth where there is no trouble or sanctuary from frustration. To try to find this utopia in life, whether in your life, your occupation, your marriage, your children, your church is futile.
- The pursuit of this life without occasional misery and frustration is frustrated by God himself, Who has subjected all things to futility so that men would hope in Him for deliverance and glory. Those who have been granted grace by God through Jesus Christ will possess the hope of glory in this life and inherit glory when they die, leaving to others all the goods they accumulated in this life under the sun. Qohelet, nonetheless, makes it clear that one will not escape the frustrations of this life.
- Verse 10 recapitulates that there is nothing new under the sun. Even old heresies recycle themselves and show up (Montanism to Pentecostalism). We see that this verse encapsulates Eccl. 1:9 and 3:15, that that which has been is what will be, and that that which is done is what will be done. There is nothing new, and there will be nothing new, under the sun. God, in Gen 1, called light into being; and Adam called every created thing a name. All that men do afterward is a renaming of that which has already been named. Yet, all things, or here "words," that do occur, including the giving of names, are under God's providential hand, and will be accountable to his judgment. All that man says and does are ultimately pointless under the sun and brings no long lasting advantage to the one who says and does them. Man cannot change paradigms that God has decreed into motion. Our unchangeable God is mightier than transient temporal, and finite man. Read Is. 45:9-10
- Finally, Qohelet states that man's life is short, and that since he cannot know God's ultimate purpose for all things, man cannot tell another what course of life will be



good for him. A man does not have infinite analysis capability to judge the outcome of every possible course of action (see James 4:13-17). When a man dies, he cannot know what will happen after him. Longman notes that “God has made men ephemeral, and that is why they cannot know the future, neither theirs, nor anyone else’s. The verse places the responsibility for this sad state of affairs squarely on God.” K&D are helpful here: “Man ought to fear God, and also, without dispute and murmuring, submit to His sway... To be able to say to him what is good for him,--i.e., what position he must take in life, what direction he must give to his activity, what decision he must adopt in difficult and important cases...[a man cannot say].” A man would have to understand the whole of his own purpose in light of all of God’s decree to be able to say to himself or to another what is good for man in his transient life under the sun.

- A man in covenant with God can, however, speak what Qohelet has spoken regarding life in a frustrating world: Fear God, eat, drink, and find joy in your wife and in the vigorous occupations of your life, for this is your portion under the sun from God, Himself. K&D: The fear of God presides over the enjoyment of life, regulating and hallowing it. So, love God and enjoy your life. With this we progress to part three of the Book of Eccl.

### **III. The fact that wise men die as do fools notwithstanding, a wise man will fare better in life than will a fool 7:1-11:6**

- Although a man cannot know what will happen after him, along with the hope of glory, he can focus on living wisely in this life. This is a new section of Eccl. points out that wisdom is better than folly. Solomon uses many “better than” proverbs to reveal that in life some things are better than others. This section, being preoccupied with death, reveals that wisdom is better than folly under the sun. So, man, who is under the sovereign control of Almighty God, has the responsibility to act wisely if he is to enjoy life truly. With this wisdom, which begins with the fear of God and with the belief in Christ as Lord, man can have the abundant life that Christ promises in Jn. 10:10. Abundant life can be lived in the earth even in the midst of frustration; in good days and in days of adversity.
- This next section is dominated by proverbs and instructions for contemplating and for living life under the sun.

## A. Wisdom is beneficial: 7:1-14

### 1. To contemplate the parameters of life 7:1-10

<sup>Verse 1</sup> **A good name is better than fine oil, and the day of death better than the day of birth.** <sup>Verse 2</sup> **Better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for it [the house of mourning] is the end of every man, and the living one should take this to heart.** <sup>Verse 3</sup> **Vexing misery is better than laughter because a vexed face is good for the heart.** <sup>Verse 4</sup> **The heart of the wise man is in the house of mourning, but the heart of the stupid/dull man is in the house of joy.** <sup>Verse 5</sup> **It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to be listening to the song of fools.** <sup>Verse 6</sup> **Indeed, as the sound of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools, and, moreover, this is without ultimate purpose.** <sup>Verse 7</sup> **Indeed, oppression causes the wise man to be foolish, and a bribe (gift) corrupts the heart.** <sup>Verse 8</sup> **Better the end of a thing than the beginning of it. Better the patient of spirit than the haughty of spirit.** <sup>Verse 9</sup> **Do not hasten to be vexed, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.** <sup>Verse 10</sup> **Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these,” for you do not ask about such from [a heart of] wisdom.**

- So, teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom (Ps. 90:12). Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they make an uproar in vain (busy themselves for nothing); he heaps up riches and does not know who will gather them. Selah (contemplate) Ps. 39:4-6.
- Longman notes that death, a major theme of this section, is scene as a means of escape from life’s oppression and meaninglessness. The idea is that the living should live in the light of death, because no one can escape that final destiny. K&D note that the Thracian tribe, the Trausi, actually celebrated their birthdays as days of sadness, and the day of death as a day of rejoicing.
- The wise man takes these psalms, proverbs, and instructions to heart that he may know his own finiteness. Qohelet wants the wise man to understand mourning and vexation, since life after the fall is filled with both most of the time. Under the sun, men sin, they die, and they are vexed to the point of wishing they were dead. Contemplating these sober and essential proverbs brings sanctification of character and more good into one’s life.
- Furthermore, while the wise man is contemplating these thoughts, he is instructed by other wise men and encouraged to be humble and patient. The wise man must also filter out of his life oppression, the words of those offering bribes, and the words of the fool who loves to give his advice (stir up issues that are distracting and amount to nothing). This chattering fool roves through life, denying its realities, as well as laughing and partying with other fools. Not only does the fool flee maturity and reality, he is also short-fused and quick to anger, and also saying, “Oh that we were in the good ole days.” The wise man will depart periodically from the ruckus to think on the eternal and to think on wisely operating in the temporal—life under the sun.

- Verse 1 is a good example of Hebrew parallelism. Regarding a good name, Solomon has taught us in Pr. 22:1 that a good reputation and loving kindness is better than great riches and gold and silver. A good name is even better than one of the most precious items in Hebrew culture—fine oil. With fine oil, which was a sign of prosperity (Duet. 32:13) one could cook, offer sacrifices, and anoint either consecrated things (e.g., the Temple) or one’s self. Both a good name and fine oil are good, yet, the benefits of fine oil notwithstanding, a good name is better. Similarly, the day of birth is good, a time for rejoicing, however, the day of death is better since one’s frustration with life under the sun comes to an end. For the infant, his frustration is just beginning. Note again Eccl. 6:3-5. Solomon wants his readers to now contemplate this somewhat morbid proverb so as to promote maturity, sanctification, and the acquisition of wisdom.
- Since the fall of Adam, every man dies. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ that we can be saved by grace through faith. Man seeks to avoid contemplating this end since it is a goad to his prideful desire to live and control things forever. Man seeks to preserve himself. He seeks to suppress this particularly sober truth by substituting it with laughter and the fellowship of other fools in the house of laughter. Nonetheless, the thought of man’s end—death—will sober the wise man while he is alive. The house of ceremonial mourning—the funeral home—and vexing misery (that which frustrates to the point of anger) cause one to see the reality of the frustration to which man was subjected as a result of the fall of mankind through Adam. The wise man seriously considers these works under the sun and this consideration, if he is wise, makes him wiser still. Moreover, Qohelet states that this vexing misery of epistemological awareness of one’s end, is good for the heart. Sorrow and frustration over one’s ultimate death leads to a wise contemplation of how one will spend his days before the living and before the Lord. Even the Apostle Paul states that godly sorrow leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). Again, we should note the Psalmist’s words in Psalm 90:12. The point of this passage is that a troubled face reflects reality and thus shows that one is not living in denial, or, in the words of John Jarick, “through the contemplation of serious matters such as death, which causes a person to wear a severe or sad facial expression, the mind is improved. The wise man should not, after contemplating death, reserve himself for an unrestrained enjoyment of life, but he must, as K&D point out, enjoy his life as conditioned by the fear of God. When man looks death in the face, the two things occur to him, that he should make use of his brief life, but make use of it in view of the end, thus in a manner for which he is responsible before God.
- Fools are oblivious to the realities of life as revealed in the Scriptures. Death, wisdom, and folly are topics too deep for the fool or stupid one. The fool delights in expressing his opinions regarding how to live and how to think about life. The wise man must not be distracted by him or take his words to heart. Furthermore, dullards are preoccupied with laughter, humor, positive thinking, joking, all as an effort to escape reality. He even calls the wise man a fool for thinking about such things.
- Since the wise man is maturing as a result of his contemplation and the fool is growing more foolish due to his attempted flight from maturity, the song or ramblings of the fool are like thorn bushes (nettles) in a fire. As the Germans say, wie das Gerausch der Nettel unter dem Kettle, or as Ginsburg translates, “as the noise of

nettles under the kettle.” They burst into a blaze of flames and then quickly disintegrate providing a lot of noise and brightness, but no lasting combustion or heat. Fools are a flash in pan causing much distraction and noise, but no profit. This is a great frustration and vanity.

- The song of fools has a large and eager audience. Their crackling songs draw many away from the less sensational words of the wise. Revivalism in the early 1800s, the Second Great Awakening, was full of the song of religious fools who, by their sensationalism and their gimmicks, led the gullible away from orthodoxy. This continued with the fools, the Northern Transcendentalists, who were instrumental in fueling the fires that led to the War Between the States. We are still hearing the song of the socialistic and anti-religionist fools today in our political arena and from America’s pulpits.
- The Word of God is profitable for instruction, correction, and rebuke so that righteous believers in Christ can be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Ti. 3:16). The wise man who believes in Christ and obeys His Word is the one to whom one should listen. Even though most would prefer songs versus rebukes, the wise man’s rebukes, accomplished for the good of the soul, is better than all of the chatter of fools both past (in their writings or other media) and present. One should submit themselves to the instruction and rebuke of wise men and women (Pr. 13:18). The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul and loves death (Pr. 8:36), but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility (Pr.15: 31-33).
- Wise men and those desiring to be wise have this understanding, which begins with the fear of Yahweh. They understand the profit of wisdom in this life. They understand the duration of their numbered days under the sun. They are, therefore, patient and self-controlled. By the power of God’s Spirit within them, wise men purge the workings of sin from their lives that would cause them to flirt with folly. The wise man can easily become a fool when money is not regarded righteously. Qohelet mentions that a wise man, when he oppresses or takes a bribe, causes himself to act as a fool. With regard to justice, God commands that one shall not pervert the judgment of the poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous (Ex. 23:6-9). Solomon, who, next to Christ, was the wisest man who had ever lived, spoke that taking a gift to pervert justice destroys the heart of a wise man. That wisdom, which a wise man may have possessed, is soon destroyed by injustice, oppression, and bribery. He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy (Pr. 14:31). Wise men must guard their hearts that they may grow in their wisdom before God. Whitley translates here, “for oppression stupefies the wise man, and destroys his strong heart.”
- Continuing, the wise man contemplates the end of all things, especially his own occupations. He knows that the end of a thing, its essential purpose, is greater than the occupations in the beginning of a thing. Crenshaw quotes the proverb in 2 Ki. 20:11: “Let not the person putting on armor brag like the one taking it off.” God’s purpose and grand scheme is greater than all the human occupations that begin and

end toward His ultimate end. This is why we know that all things work together for the elect's good. The wise understand that frustration is high in an effort's beginning, but that keeping one's eye on the end will promote a stick-to-it-tiveness to success—a mental relief and resolve to frustration (frustrated about not knowing God's ultimate end), impatience, anger, and discouragement. He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly. Pr. 14:29

- If one is wise enough to understand that God glorifies Himself by ordaining a beautiful and acceptable end to all things, then one would refrain from being frustrated and angry, for these characteristics are eagerly clutched by the fool. Qohelet speaks that patience and humility is greater than impatience and pride, both of which can precede destruction. The wise man also sees that as God's Kingdom fills the earth, progressively and ultimately, the days in front of him constitute better days than those before. A selfish and foolish generation longs for the days gone by. Those days have had their time under the sun. Luther has stated that such a question that is in verse 10 could only be asked by "glorifiers of time past." Longman notes that Solomon has already emphasized that there is nothing new under the sun. K\*D note that "in truth every age has its bright and dark sides; and this division of light and shadow between the past and the present betrays a want of understanding of the signs of the times and ways of God."
- We should rejoice (Pr. 10:6-7) or remorse (1 Pet 4:1-5) over past days and then proceed to advance to the glory of God. The wise do not live forever contemplating the good days of the past, for they know the end of their days, therefore they seek to glorify God and to occupy themselves in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit both today and in their future under the sun. Wisdom is profitable for this contemplative end. Live wisely under the sun and you will live forever with your Lord.
- Spurgeon gives us encouraging words for discouraging times: "(These) are said to be very horrible times—they always were ever I have known anything of the world, and I suppose they always were in our fathers' time. We are always at a crisis according to some people. I am not about to defend the times; they are, no doubt, very bad, for the innumerable spirits of evil are bold and active, while good men seem to have lost their courage. We find amalgamations and compromises ad infinitum, and the precious truth of God is trodden as the mire of the streets. What about all this? Are we discouraged? Far from it. Bad times are famous times for Christ. When Wycliffe came, the times were dark enough in England, and therefore the morning star was the more welcome. When Luther came into the world, the times were almost as black as they could be and therefore good times for reformation. The times were dead enough when Wesley and Whitefield came: but they proved glorious days for the Lord to work in! And if you discern now that there is not much prayerfulness, nor much spirituality, nor much truthful doctrine, nor much zeal, do not fret; it is thoroughly dry soil, and now the root of grace will grow. Let us have good hope. Our faith does not rise when people say the times are improving, nor do we despond when men denounce the times as bad. Eternity is the life time of God, and He will work out his purposes. Time may ebb and flow, God is in no hurry; but if the world goes on for a million years God will triumph in the end, and the poem of human history will not

wine up with a dirge, but will end with a triumphant hymn after all. *From “A Root Out of Dry Ground,” delivered on Lord’s Day morning, October 13, 1872.*

## 2. To manage wealth 7:11-12

**Verse 11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance and is of benefit to the ones seeing the sun. Verse 12 For wisdom is a shelter, and money is a shelter, and the advantage of knowledge is [that] wisdom keeps alive her master.**

- Qohelet reveals to us that wisdom and money, an inheritance, is of great benefit to those who are alive. We cannot take money with us when we die, but with wisdom we can glorify God with wealth, we can build up an estate, and we can pay for solutions for many problems we may encounter. Wisdom is necessary to maintain and to increase an estate. An inheritance left to a fool will most likely dissipate over two or three generations because the fool will squander it and then leave nothing of value to his heirs. A fool and his wealth are soon departed.
- Ginsburg quotes Rashbam: “A man’s wisdom is more respected, and is more advantageous, when it goes together with the patrimony and property bequeathed to him by his father, which will not abide unless he has wisdom to manage his riches; but still better than riches is wisdom for those who lead a public life, for their wisdom assists and maintains them.
- Parents should gain wisdom and with it build an estate to the glory of God. Subsequently, these same parents should impart wisdom to their children so that they are able to manage and to build the inheritance they receive.
- Money and wisdom compliment one another. The wise man is usually both diligent and wealthy. Both money and wisdom provide a shelter from the most frustrating of situations under the sun (e.g., no food, no clothing, no home, no pleasant goods [microwave oven]). It is the love of money that is evil. As Qohelet has stated earlier, the man who loves money is never satisfied with his money, but engages in ceaseless toil to gain more. This is without point—vanity. But money is good in the hands of one who is wise. Although unbelievers may be rich and have an inheritance, I do not believe that the Bible would refer to them as wise, for the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Simply put, for a believer, wisdom and money are of great benefit in this life, for the believer can not only maintain, use, and build up his estate, he can also be content with whatever estate he is given by God. The wise man knows that wisdom is profitable to manage wealth in this life
- However, when money and wisdom are ranked against one another, wisdom is better than money and it brings great advantage both in this life and in that which is to come. Wisdom enables a man to escape the snares of this life, such as working that which is lawless before God and criminal before man. Wisdom, either with or without money, enables a man to know God and Jesus Christ. And this is life eternal, according to Christ (Jn. 17), to know God and His Son Jesus Christ whom He sent. Wisdom from above is a gift from God by grace and gives life, abundant life to all those who embrace her. Christ is the redemptive wisdom from God (1 Cor. 1:30), making wisdom accessible to sinners. See Proverbs 4:1-13.

### 3. To understand that God works prosperity and adversity 7:13-14

Verse 13 **Consider the deed of God, for who can straighten that which he has bent.**

Verse 14 **In the day of prosperity, be in happiness, but in a time of misery, consider this, God has made this [time] as well as the other so that man cannot discover anything after him.**

- Qohelet has taught that God rules over all and that what he makes straight cannot be made crooked (1:15). God has made all things acceptable in their own time (3:11). God alone is wise, and to Him all glory must go (Rom. 16:27). He is the One who spoke and it was accomplished. He is the One who framed the world by the Word of God (Heb. 11:3), and He is the One who sustains the world and its inhabitants. What He has decreed will be done. The elect are numbered and the reprobate are numbered. Note the Westminster Divines regarding the decrees of God. No one or thing can change His wise way. Nothing can separate us, His elect, from His love. No one can straighten what He has bent. Since He works all things either directly or through secondary causes, we must rejoice always (Phil. 4:4) and in everything give thanks (1 Thess. 5:16-18). We must serve the Lord with gladness of heart for all things (Deut. 28:47-48).
- Since God has decreed all things that come to pass for His own glory, we must then be joyful in heart in times of prosperity and that of misery. Rejoicing, yes, in the times of abundance, but then in times of adversity, we should consider that God has also ordained and made this time too. God has created both times to bless men, to test men, and to show them their incapability of knowing His grand scheme.
- Qohelet desires that we know our finiteness and God's infinite wisdom and greatness. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable (*this is Qohelet's point*) are His judgments and His ways past finding out (*this also is Qohelet's point*) (Rom. 11:33). For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid (Is. 40:13; Jer. 23:18; Job 36:22; Rom. 11:34-35). Man can only know what God reveals to Him through His Word and through His works of creation and Providence. God, however, has not communicated to man that wisdom that reveals a man's end and that which will come after him. That knowledge is reserved for God alone. A man rejoices in good times and endures the misery and frustration of bad times. God ordains both times and the wise know this; however, just a secretly as God brings blessings and adversity, God permits no man to know what will occur after his time under the sun. Although this is frustrating, a wise man can submit his inquisition to the wisdom of God and be content with his derivative and finite knowledge about himself and his circumstances.

**B. However, it is enough that man should possess God's wisdom and that he not pursue being as wise as God Himself 7:15-8:1** Given that God's ways are unsearchable and that His wisdom is deep, Qohelet teaches to do what God requires (in His Word is implied), and to know that which God reveals. In this manner we leave the secret things to the Almighty.

## 1. Pursue that righteousness and wisdom that God has revealed and has required 7:15-22

**Verse 15** Of everything I have seen in the days of my futility, there is a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man living long in his wickedness. **Verse 16** Be not overly righteous, and be not excessively wise. Why ruin yourself. **Verse 17** Do not be overly wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die when it is not your time. **Verse 18** It is good that you grasp to one without letting your hand go of [the] other. For the one fearing God will avoid all of them. **Verse 19** Wisdom is mighty to the wise man more than ten rulers in a city. **Verse 20** For there is not a righteous man on earth who does right and never sins. **Verse 21** Moreover, do not give your attention (your heart) to all of the words people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you, **Verse 22** for your heart knows, that you also cursed others many times.

- The Scriptures reveal that the normal course of Providence is that the days of the righteous shall be lengthy like a tree (Ps. 91) and that the wicked shall be cut off early in their days (Note especially the annex to Commandment 5 in Ex.20 and Eph. 6). When Solomon sees the opposite of what he has come to expect, given the information in Scripture, he becomes sorely vexed. However, given that our God alone knows the entire universal scheme of things and how that they are ordered, we cannot know why He does what He does under the sun. For instance, why do godly men die young and wicked men seem to live long and increase. This is a frustrating phenomenon that Solomon encountered as he pursued wisdom and wickedness and folly. Even though we know they shall be judged before God, this situation leads one initially to say, “why exert one’s self to attain over righteousness or excessive wisdom?”
- We can know that God does what He wills, and who can say to Him, “Why have you done this.” We do know that the wicked will be eternally judged and that it will be well for the righteous (Ps. 37). But, how God’s self-glorifying decree will be worked out under the sun, we cannot know. If this bothers us, we must recognize our finiteness and His transcendence. Paul, in Rom. 9:19-21, speaking of God’s electing purpose, states that we cannot know and should not inquire regarding the secret things of God—His eternal decree. We cannot know these things and, according to Solomon in this section, He is not revealing them.
- Since God does what He wills and since we have His revelation regarding how to glorify and enjoy Him forever, we should simply, by His grace, obey what He has ordered. This means we should believe in Christ, depart from sin, and live a holy life in obedience to His commands while relying upon the grace of God to do so. Furthermore, we are commanded to enjoy all things with which we occupy our hands. God would have us to possess His righteousness, which is the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:21-26). We possess this righteousness by God’s grace through the new birth, or regeneration. We continue to live righteously by departing from iniquity (2 Ti. 2:19). God has always required of His people to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God (Mic. 6:8 and Rom. 12:1-2). By God’s abundant grace, we are to simply walk in all of God’s commands as followers of Christ. We should add nothing



to these commands (greater burdens which violate Christian liberty), nor should we subtract from these commands (falling short of God's calling).

- The Pharisees and modern legalists are what Solomon is referring to as overly righteous. These legalists seek a righteousness that is not of God, perhaps in the attempts to supererogate (to do beyond what is expected) or to justify themselves. Jesus said that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:20). Solomon is stating that since we cannot know the ultimate end of our lives we cannot add to them or subtract from them by *doing more righteous acts for God*. We cannot supererogate to gain His favor, His justification, or His wisdom regarding the scheme of all things. In addition, with regard to wisdom, let us be content with understanding God and His creation in terms of God's Holy Law. *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Law (Deut. 28:29)*. The Gnostics of Ancient Greece and in the early church always sought a higher knowledge, which was not afforded to the common man, in order to understand the entire scheme of the universe. The lives of these Gnostics were without resolve because the secret modality of the universe was not revealed to them. They were endeavoring to become excessively wise.
- Presbyterian minister William B. Sprague, in a sermon preached on this text (7:16b and c) on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1835, considered being overly wise as being wise in one's own conceit. He preached this sermon in refutation of those Temperance Movement supporters who would not rest until wine was even expelled from the Holy Communion of the Church. Although Sprague supported the removal of alcoholic beverage from society, he vehemently opposed altering the Scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper with wine—the fruit of the vine.
- Sprague noted (source: Naphtali Press: An anthology of Presbyterian and Reformed literature) that men should not be wise above what is written in Scripture. "Be not so wise as to attempt to make things plain which God in his wisdom has seen best left obscure; or to make things appear absurd which God has been pleased to reveal as matters of faith; or to abate a single particle from the strictness of God's truth, or to mar in the least degree the purity of his instructions." "For why shouldst thou destroy thyself." Sprague said that men or women who do this set themselves up for the punishment of God, the line of which no human could fathom. The point of wisdom is to base our faith upon what God has revealed, either directly, or indirectly, in His word. "But there are many who show themselves over-wise by departing from this simple principle, and making a use of their reason in connection with God's truth, for which reason never was designed."
- Sprague's examples of being overly-wise (exalting reason above revelation): 1) The Trinity: one man approaches the topic in a cavalier manner and contemptuously asks how one can be three or three one. He then smiles and believes he has demolished the whole fabric of orthodoxy with one blow. Another man not only believes in the Trinity, but uses rational to explain the concept and then shows that even if the Bible were not written, men could obtain this knowledge from earthly similitude (Evidentialists). 2) The Divine and human agency in our salvation: The scriptural doctrine is that man works out his salvation and that God works in a man to will and

do His good pleasure. The over-wise are not satisfied with this simple truth. One says man is the only agent in salvation (Pelagius, Finney). Another says that man is passive and that his part is minimal—God does it all—and man has no part in lawful living (holiness). Another uses reason to explain each member of the godhead’s work in extra-biblical detail regarding man’s salvation using philosophical language to impress the listener. Finally, another says who can know regarding salvation. This one goes the way of the infidel. 3) The Sabbath Day. One theologian not only observes the Sabbath, but requires many services and religious activities from his parishioners to fulfill the Sabbath requirement—thus adding to what God requires. This one is being not only overly wise, but also overly righteous. God requires that which He requires—nothing more and nothing less (c.f., Micah 6:8) Another dismisses the whole day as simply a convenient, with historical precedent, day to assemble as the church.

- And finally, 4) Drinking wine. Pastor Sprague had to deal with those who wanted to bring the Temperance Movement into the church and outlaw wine in the communion (we still see this today). Many in the post civil war Temperance movement believed that if the church’s communion continued to include the administration of wine (as did Jesus to His disciples), then the Movement’s success would be threatened. Sprague chastened those who would alter the plain teaching of Scripture to outlaw wine in the communion. “Another way in which men make themselves over-wise on this subject is by modifying the ordinance to suit their own views; especially by inculcating the doctrine (trying to make the word wine mean grape juice or wine and grape juice—this is folly), or adopting the practice of dispensing with the appropriate elements, or of substituting something in place of them, which the Scriptures do not warrant. Sprague noted that the over-wise work over time. They change sound doctrine to false doctrine over a long period of time. “...while the current in favor of this innovation has been imperceptibly becoming stronger, no effort has been made to resist it; and even ministers of the gospel have been silent, because they have apprehended no serious danger, or possibly because they have feared to sound the alarm, lest it should subject them to the charge of being hostile to one of the best of causes...” “But then I know that the whole history of the Church shows that such innovations come in by little and little.” He added, “Be not deceived by the parade of Oriental learning on this subject [the experts]. Remember that no authority is worth a rush, that contradicts the plain declarations of Christ.” “The Master himself has settled it; has settled it for the obscurest peasant as truly as for the most eminent biblical critic. And no man, no body of men, has a right to call in question the Master’s decision.” By the way, the OPC is indifferent on the issue. The Roman church mixes the wine with water. The Greek Orthodox Church insists on wine. Lutheran and Reformed churches are indifferent. Sprague says that, “...if wine is not essential to the celebration of the communion, by the very conditions of the ordinance, I know not what is.”
- Sprague noted that one stated to him that he would be willing to have the ordinance abandoned entirely, rather than it should stand in the way of the cause of Temperance. Sprague noted that a very noted friend of his stated with restrained passion, “Sir, nothing has occurred since I indulged a hope that I was a disciple of Christ, which has operated so powerfully as a temptation to believe that all religion is a miserable

delusion, as the fact that grave ministers of the gospel are trying to remodel, and in effect blot out, that ordinance in which I have been accustomed to celebrate my Redeemer's death; in connection with the equally astounding fact, that no one of you, who are set for the defense of the gospel, has ventured to open his lips in public to arrest the progress of this impious fanaticism." Sprague saw bowing to the Temperance Movement as a stumbling block the clergy places in the path of the laity.

- Sprague concluded in his preaching that "...if the Temperance cause claims a precedence of the institutions of God, then I insist that it claims too much. If it cannot go forward but at the expense of perverting or annihilating an ordinance or our religion, then I insist that it is high time it should come to a solemn pause; and I say unhesitatingly, perish the hand—no matter what hand it be—that would profanely withdraw from the Supper either of the memorials of my Redeemer's death! Let God's institutions stand in their own simple majesty, though the noblest fabric which man ever built should be prostrate in the dust."
- To summarize, Qohelet is saying that if one were either a religious rigorist, seeking to be overly righteous, or a seeker of hidden knowledge or one presuming to add to God's wisdom, one would only destroy one's self. This Pharisaical, Gnostic, and overly-wise pursuit of both righteousness, knowledge, and wisdom, would crowd out the enjoying of one's life, and that to no end. Furthermore, it could lead to God's judgment upon a man. In view of this, don't be a religious rigorist, or be overly wise. Simply do what is required by God. Micah 6:8 tells us to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God. Don't seek a righteousness other than God's in Christ. Don't seek a wisdom that is higher than what God has already revealed in His Word. Regarding religious rigor, let us not allow religion or religious activity to burden us from enjoying our lives. Let us not allow religion to violate our Christian liberty as defined by the Westminster Divines (WCF XX). God would have us righteous (according to His Word) and wise (according to His revelation in His Word, His creation, and His Providence).
- To understand why Solomon asks the rhetorical question, "Why should you die before your time," we should note that he truly speaks in Eccl. 7:20 that there is not a righteous man on earth. God created mankind upright, but man has devised many wicked schemes (other worldviews, cf. 7:29). Even the new birth does not rid us of the working of sin in our members (Rom. 7:21-24). Therefore, we must, by God's grace, and with complete reliance upon Christ's vicarious atonement on the cross, pursue righteous, good works as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. A wise Christian man departs from iniquity and does not pursue wickedness, which Solomon here refers to as "being overly wicked." We are wicked enough as is shown as we daily pursue God's sanctification. We need not seek to think, to speak, and to do any more wickedly than our sinning members within already want to accomplish. Solomon annexes to this thought that the excessively wicked and the fool will be judged before their appointed time, which for man would be a long life. Again, long life for the righteous is the normal course of Providence in God's universal scheme. Solomon tells us not to destroy ourselves and not to die before our time by not being overly righteous, excessively wise, overly wicked, and foolish.
- Solomon warns us that we should remember both not to be overly righteous and not to be overly wicked. This is not a plea for the Aristotelian "middle of the road," or

moderation theory, which is often referred to today as the “life of balance.” Qohelet is warning us against Pharisaism and Gnosticism. One who fears God will submit to His holy laws, not doing more than is required—because he understands Christian liberty, and not doing any less than what God demands—because he understands the depravity and final judgement of mankind. Qohelet has spoken three times now of the fear of the Lord. He exhorts his listener/s to fear God and then tells them the benefit of this fear.

- Solomon goes on to state that wisdom is might to a man; indeed, a might that is greater than that of ten rulers of a city. These rulers master, or dominate a city. Wisdom leads this wise man and makes him very powerful in his environment. Note in Eccl 9:13-18 how that the wisdom of one man made him strong and powerful in a city. Wisdom is very profitable for the living. It spares one’s life and enables him to deliver others.
- A wise man must use his wisdom to avoid the snares of death, for there is no man on the earth who is just and does not sin. Any man saying that he is just and does not sin is a liar. The Westminster Divines used this scripture as a proof for Question #82 of the WCF SC #82. Solomon, Paul, and John understood this fact (1 Ki. 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36; Pr. 20:9; Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 1:8). A wise man, one recognizing that no one is without sin, will embrace Christian liberty and recognize this right for others. He will also depart from evil. This man will be mighty in the earth and will enjoy God and glorify Him throughout his life.
- Furthermore, if a man knows the workings of sin in his own members and that of others, especially if they are unregenerate (slaves of sin), he will not be quick to be startled at harsh words against him. Qohelet states that one should not give himself to meditating on the words of others about himself. You could be being cursed behind your back. So don’t seek to hear what they’re saying about you. You know that people will sin in thought, word, and deed. And don’t become overly pious about their shortcomings of character and control of the tongue, for you, even you (emphasis is strong in Hebrew here) know your own sin—that you’ve cursed others behind their backs.
- So, wisdom is profitable under the sun. It enables one to fare better than if one were a fool consumed in folly and subsequent wickedness. As a redeemed sinner, seek to obtain the wisdom which God reveals and seek His righteousness, faith in Christ, for this is what is good for man. Being a religious rigorist or a sloppy, wicked one will only cause harm or destruction—why die before your time.

## 2. Understanding God's universal scheme is too profound for man 7:23-8:1

**Verse 23** I have proven all of this by wisdom, I said that I will be wise, but this was distant from me. **Verse 24** Whatever wisdom may be, [it is] deep, deep, who can find it? **Verse 25** I, even I, turned my heart to know and to spy out and to seek wisdom and the whole scheme [of things] and to understand the wickedness of folly and the folly of madness. **Verse 26** And I am finding more bitter than death, the woman who is snares, whose heart is nets, and whose hands are chains, the one who is good before God will escape from her, but the sinning one will be captured by her. **Verse 27** See! This I have found under the sun, Qohelet says, [adding] one thing to another to find the overall scheme [of things]. **Verse 28** While I was still searching, but not finding, I found one man among a thousand, but one woman among these I have not found. **Verse 29** See! This only I have found, that God made man upright, but they search for many schemes. **Chapter 8 Verse 1** Who is like the wise man? And who is knowing the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom brightens the fierce countenance and his face is changed.

- Since Eccl. 1:17, Qohelet has revealed to us that he set his heart to pursue wisdom—to know the scheme of all things in the universe. During his lifelong pursuit of wisdom, he never obtained the comprehensive knowledge of all things. He not only wanted to know after the manner of God, which we all have and develop, but he wanted to know all that God knows, definitively the whole scheme of things. As is revealed here and elsewhere in Eccl., Solomon wanted to investigate and to comprehend wisdom and the whole scheme of things (their reason for being and doing what they do—the ultimate end of all things knowable). In addition, he sought to understand the wickedness of folly and the folly of madness. K&D note that Solomon wants to possess wisdom fully and completely; i.e., not merely to be able to record observations and communicate advices, but to adjust the contradictions of life, to expound the mysteries of time and eternity, and generally to solve the most weighty and important questions which perplex men.
- Given that God only communicates the ability to know what He reveals to mankind, Solomon could not have that which he desired because God does not impart to man omniscience. God's knowledge is deep and incomprehensible. *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! Rom. 11:33* Who can know true wisdom in all of its comprehensiveness. No one!
- During Solomon's pursuit of the knowledge of God's whole scheme, he made some observations that are quite startling. One observation he continually finds more bitter, more perplexing, vexing, that it is more so than death itself—the strange woman. The observation of the strange or evil woman is that of which he speaks here and not womankind in general as some purport. Solomon does recognize the value of a virtuous woman (Pr. 31; Eccl. 9:9 [how could he think that a covenant man would marry an evil woman and live joyfully with her?]). Pr. 6:23-28 teaches that the evil woman uses her flattering tongue and beauty to lure and to destroy the precious life of the covenant man.. Pr. 7:6-27 reveals that the evil woman is crafty, beautiful, desirable, and deadly. Her heart is filled with adultery. Qohelet elaborates here that

she is a snare, her heart is as nets, and her hands are chains. The righteous will heed Solomon's wise warning to young men not to let their heart turn toward her ways. For the evil woman has slain many, and that those who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to sheol, descending to the chambers of death. Those who continually fear God and keep His commands will escape her tantalizing snares. She does, however, snag the foolish. Most notable is that her victims are many. She destroys simple men, those without wisdom.

- R. Laird Harris notes that Jeremiah's generation was foolish and without understanding, and yet it was more than a mere lack of understanding (Jer. 5:21). Spiritual apostasy is foolishness. This is apparent when people are wise to evil but devoid of the knowledge to do good (Jer. 4:22). Eccl. underscores the spiritual and particularly moral misfit who demonstrates to all that he is a fool (Eccl. 10:3). Wisdom is the way of moral and spiritual man while folly is the way of a man with twisted values. Foolishness and madness is pictured by the sinner who allows himself to be entrapped by an immoral woman. The one who would be wise and pleasing to God escapes from her clutches.
- A second observation is recorded by Solomon in this section; an observation regarding the ethical status of the human race in general. Qohelet describes the scarcity of good, God-fearing people. A good man is as rare as one in one thousand. Solomon has said before, "...but a faithful man, who can find?" (Pr 20:6) Perhaps he speaks hyperbolically. The righteous man in one thousand would be an upright, or righteous man (fearing God and keeping His commands). A righteous man who lives by faith in Yahweh and steers clear of the evil, strange woman. Qohelet notes the dearth of God-fearing men, yet notes the even greater dearth of God-fearing women, virtuous women. It was the multitude of wives and concubines that caused Solomon to stumble, therefore, he speaks from the Holy Spirit and from his own life experience. Historically, many theologians have spoken that since Eve, women have been the most wicked, manipulating, and conniving of the human race.
- Longman quotes Christian Ginsburg quoting St. Chrysostom, "What is woman, but a punishment that cannot be driven away, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, one believed for the colour of good." The old Jewish proverb is, "women carry in themselves a frivolous mind." *Kiddushin 80b*. And because a woman, when she has fallen into evil, surpasses a man in fiendish superiority therein, the Midrash reckons under this passage before us fifteen things of which the one is worse than the other; the thirteenth is death, and the fourteenth a bad woman. Also, K&D write that the Persian courts afford dreadful examples of the truth of the old proverb: "Woe to the age whose leader is a woman." They add that the harem is a den of female wickedness. Luther recognized Solomon's words as "a divine ordinance." We know that Luther dearly loved his wife, however, he knew the scarcity of good Christian women. Solomon did also recognize the value of a good woman (9:9).
- It is rightly argued that it was the woman who tempted Adam to sin and, since then, she has sought preeminence over the man ever since (1 Ti. 2:8-15). Solomon here, to the chagrin of the feminists, makes a general statement about women in general, and that is that there are very few good, upright women. Perhaps now we better understand his words in Pr. 18:22, "He that has found a wife has found a good thing

and favor from the Lord,” and, “Who can find a virtuous woman?” Those with good wives should rejoice, for they, as well as good women in general, are a rare commodity.

- After these few observations, Solomon emphasizes the underlying truth that manifests itself in the dearth of good men and especially good women: the depravity of mankind from Adam. God made Adam in the image of Himself: in true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. The woman was tempted by the Tempter and did sin. She, in turn, tempted the man and he did sin. So, man was, indeed, made, or created upright, but because of Adam’s sin, he fell and has sought his own worldview and strategy for a successful life ever since. Solomon here refers to man as a searcher for the overall scheme of things. To fear God and to keep His commands, and therefore to believe in Christ is too narrow of a worldview for the unregenerate schemer. Many who are regenerate continue to reject God’s way of obedience to their own hurt.
- But a wise man seeks first God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). The wise man seeks to do justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly before God. It is this man, who meditates in God’s Word, who will be able to rightly interpret himself, God, and the world around Him according to the Bible. This wise man knows that, aside from the truth as revealed in the Word, he cannot know truth or any true scheme or interpretation of things. Any pursuit of knowledge apart from God’s knowledge in His Word cannot be proven true though one thousand evidences would try to convince one of an extra-biblical truth. But, a wise man—a man who understands the foundation of things—quietly and contently submits himself to God’s revealed scheme, although God does not reveal all things to the wise man.
- This humble and contented character of the wise man enables him to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. This estate softens the man and makes him a man of lovingkindness vs. a brash and ill-tempered man. The fierceness of the man is diminished and the wise man’s face is changed to that even children love to look upon. The wise in Christ bear witness to the wisdom and grace within them by virtue of their comely countenance. With this we end the second section of the second part of the book (It is enough that man should possess God’s wisdom and that he not pursue being as wise as God Himself)..

### **C. The wise man understands that the Most High God rules over time and judgment under the sun 8:2-9:12**

- Daniel 4 records Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream. Nebuchadnezzar saw a vision wherein a watcher (an angel), a holy one, coming down from heaven, cried with a loud voice, “...This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, [and that He] gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.” (vs. 17) Daniel, in interpreting the dream, told Nebuchadnezzar that he would be humbled “...till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.” (vs. 23) Daniel added, “And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that heaven is ruling. Therefore, O

king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.” (vs.’ 26-27)

- God communicated to Nebuchadnezzar that He rules and does what He wills. God’s Providence (his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions Q11, WSC) may be frustrating to many who believe they have fully understood God’s overall scheme. Frustration comes when the wicked live long, the righteous die young, and the wise are belittled and forgotten. This third section of the third part of the book continues to present the benefits and frustrations of acting wisely under the sun. To comfort the listener, Qohelet presents a two-fold comfort (resolve 5 and 6) to those experiencing frustration with life under the sun.

### 1. Just as the decree of the king, God’s decree is unchangeable 8:2-9

**Chapter 8 verse 2 I say, obey the command of the king on account of [the] word of the oath of God. Verse 3 Do not hurry to leave his presence; do not stand for the sake of a bad cause, for everything that he pleases, he will do. Verse 4 Since the word of the king dominates [all], who, then, can say to him, “what are you doing.” Verse 5 The one obeying his command will know nothing harmful, but a wise heart will know time and judgment. Verse 6 For to every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man is heavy upon him. Verse 7 For a man knows not what will come, for as to what will come, who can tell him. Verse 8 No man has mastery over the wind to restrain the wind, so no one has power over the day of death, and no one is discharged in the war, and wickedness will not deliver its masters. Verse 9 All of this I saw [while] applying my heart to every work that is done under the sun; [there is] a time when one man dominates over another man to his misery.**

- Qohelet, the philosopher king, teaches the wise young man to obey, or submit to, the edict of the sovereign. This passage has led many to believe that another besides Solomon wrote Eccl. Many theologians hold that this is a passage that is hostile to the monarchy—a hostility that would not be exuded from a king himself. I disagree. Solomon, Qohelet, is now providing wise counsel regarding the mode of operation of a king. To understand and accept this mode will make it less frustrating to understand the Providence of God regarding man’s end.
- The king, here, is the one to whom an oath of allegiance has been made before God. In the Near East, vassals were known to take oaths of allegiance to their new sovereigns. The point here is that kings do whatever they will, therefore, men must obey the king on account of their oath to God or risk their lives by rebelling. Furthermore, men must act appropriately before the king. As Eccl. 3:1-8 has instructed, there is an acceptable time for every action under the sun. A wise man will act in a calculated and suitable manner around a sovereign and render the appropriate custom (Rom. 13:7). Pr. 24:21-22 states, “My son, fear Yahweh and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?” We see here in this proverb



a stern warning not to speak things before the king and the King of Kings that one has no intention of fulfilling.

- Certainly inherent in this verse is the aspect of not doing evil in the king's presence, nor to take one's stand for evil before a sovereign. Even if one has committed inadvertent error in performing the king's bidding, one should not run from the king's presence. Allow the king to dismiss you and not you yourself. Note the monarchy protocol of the Persian empire (Esther 4:10-17). Perhaps the sense here in this passage of Eccl. is not to carry one's self presumptuously before a sovereign who defines the boundaries of right and wrong by his own standard. In *Abboth* of Jewish tradition, "The wise man does not interrupt another, and hastens not to answer." Furthermore, the king does what he wills and far be it for one to take a stand against the king, especially in doing evil. The word of the king is supreme. It is final.
- Of course this passage speaks directly of the temporal king, however, of speaking against the King of all kings Paul says, "You will say to me then, Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will? But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have power over the clay..." Qohelet is using this temporal illustration to introduce a section on the sovereign decree of God regarding the numbered days of man.
- Throughout redemptive history, God's covenant people took an oath to follow their Sovereign, Yahweh (Phil. 2:9-11; Is. 45:23-25). Furthermore, with regard to taking an oath before Yahweh, Eccl. 5:1-8 teaches one not to speak presumptuously, specifically in oath taking before God. Again, although this current section of Eccl. speaks of an earthly sovereign, the overall context is the sovereign decree and will of God as it interfaces with the affairs of man. This section points us to God's Providence. Verses 4 and 5 reveal the king's sovereign rule in the affairs of man, but verse 6 reveals a turn in description to that of God's Providence over man, of which the king's governing power is a type. Since man cannot overrule the sovereign ruler, or know his ultimate scheme, then he must resign himself to humble obedience and to a tight lip with regard to foolish inquisition of the king's words and way (e.g., "Tell me why you're doing it this way versus that way?"). If the subject, in this case the young wise man, is humble, courteous, and quiet, then no harm will come to him before the presence of the sovereign. This is also the manner in which one would give the appropriate honor to the king (1 Pet. 2:17)
- Eccl has taught us thus far that the fear of the king is not unlike the fear of the Lord. The command of the king and of the Lord is to be obeyed. The king's word and Yahweh's word are to be heard and obeyed. One is not to do evil before the presence of either a king or God for it shall be well to the righteous, but woe to the wicked. The wise man will keep the commands of both. Again, the words of both the king and those especially of the King of Kings is sovereign and final.
- In verse 5, Qohelet reminds us that the wise man knows time and judgment and, furthermore, during man's frustrating existence under the sun, there is a time and judgment for every matter. This is a reiteration of Eccl 3:1 and 3:17, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every desire and for every work." The misery upon man is that he may have to endure cruelty in his life (see vs. 9) and that he doesn't know when his day of death will come. This inability

to know the future with respect to his works on the earth is particularly frustrating (see Eccl 6:12). This is a misery that burdens men. It is a weighty burden upon him. A man can neither know what will come upon him, nor can he receive this information from any other man. This introduces an element of uncertainty or risk to a man's life. This uncertainty can never be eliminated, however, Qohelet endeavors to help men resolve how to think and behave in the midst of this frustrating and miserable uncertainty, which culminates in death. Qohelet now describes the trajectory of man toward death from which there is no escape.

- Note in Pr. 24:22 that the judgments of the king and of God come suddenly and no one can escape. This inability to escape from Providence with regard to death is likened unto a man's inability to master the wind. A man can never know ultimately, or at all times, from where the wind comes or where it will go (note this act of God's sovereignty with regard to the new birth in Jn. 3: 1-8). Furthermore, mankind has no power to dominate the wind. The disciples of Christ knew this and were astounded when the man, Christ Jesus, mastered the elements. They said, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Matt. 8:27
- In a like manner, a man has no mastery, or dominance, over the day he will die. Death, although swallowed up in Christ, is still an enemy to all men, Christian and non-Christian, under the sun. Covenantally, the Christian man has passed from death into life (1 Jn. 3:14), and God has delivered him from the power of darkness and transferred him into the kingdom of the Son of His love...(Col. 1:13). He sits with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Death will not be completely defeated until the day of judgment when the dead are raised, some to perdition and others to glory (Rev. 20:11-15).
- Only Christ has the mastery over death. The glorified Christ has said, "...I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." (Rev. 1:17-18) Only the wise man who trusts in Christ for eternal life will see eternal life and incorruption. The fool rejects God and His Son whom He sent.
- Until the Great Judgment at the end of time, man has no mastery over death in this life. He cannot escape it as did Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Ki. 2:11). Paul makes this point very clear saying that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." (1 Cor. 15:50) The probability of escaping physical death under the sun is the same probability of being discharged from the military in the heat of a battle (unlike military discharge laws of Deut. 20:5-8), or of being eternally delivered from destruction as a result of an abundance of wickedness. Ps. 49:6-9 reveals that "Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever—that he should continue to live eternally, and not experience corruption (see the pit). Death is inescapable. Death is part of the futility to which God subjected the created world. It cannot be escaped.
- Verse 9 reveals that Solomon received his wisdom regarding protocol before the king, the king's sovereignty, and man's inescapable mortality, while he was examining all works accomplished under the sun. Qohelet Solomon teaches us that through this the wise man will fare better in this life than will the fool. Furthermore, this verse ends

this section by revealing that not only is the unpredictable nature of death a misery upon man, but oppression during life can make even life itself, while waiting for death, even more miserable. The man who is a master over and oppresses his fellow man, makes others miserable (c.f. Les Miserable—note in this movie the oppressor: Javier [ja-vear]; and the oppressed: Jean [zshohn] Valjean). Oppression, although it has its appropriate time from God, is not long lasting, for God, in His ordained time, brings relief to the oppressed and judgment to the oppressors. Rom. 13 teaches that it is the normal course of Providence that a ruler or ruling body rule to the benefit of the righteous and to the peril of the wicked. Pr. 11:17-21 reveals that ruthless men retain riches (vs. giving to others), are cruel and trouble their own souls, do deceptively, pursue evil and their own death, are of a perverted heart and an abomination to Yahweh. The wicked, though they join forces, will not go unpunished.

- God reserves his judgment for the appropriate time, and the wise man knows that the Most High rules over time and judgment under the sun. He also knows that all oppressors will be judged (Ps. 2). God’s decree of futility is unchangeable and a wise man understands this. Solomon has taught us this truth many times. He will reiterate the truth of God’s time and judgment in the next section.

**2. All men, both the righteous and the wicked, will be judged by God, whether in this life or in the next 8:10-14**

**Verse 10 And this I saw, wicked ones being buried—indeed they came from the place of holiness and went—and they are forgotten in the city where they did this. Moreover, this is frustrating. Verse 11 When the edict of the deed of the crime is not accomplished quickly, the heart of the sons of men is filled to do evil. Verse 12 Although sinners are working one hundred evils and are living long, indeed, moreover I know that it will be better with the God-fearers who are reverent before his face. Verse 13 And it will not be well with the wicked and his days will not be lengthened like the shadow because he does not fear the face of God. Verse 14 There is frustration that occurs on the earth, there are righteous men that [receive] the desert of wicked men, and there are the wicked men to whom it happens to them [according] to the desert of the righteous men.**

- Man doesn’t know God’s entire scheme. Because of this, man is tempted to be frustrated and even angered to the point of vexation when he sees injustice prolonged. Man, perhaps, finds God’s appropriate time for everything disheartening and frustrating. Nonetheless, God will execute his judgment upon both the righteous and the wicked both in this life and most assuredly on the final Day of Judgment.
- To understand Qohelet’s assured conclusions here, one needs to read and meditate upon his father’s words in Ps 37 regarding the heritage of the righteous and the calamity of the wicked. The righteous will not be ashamed and the wicked will not be exonerated. For all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of all works accomplished in the flesh (under the sun) (2 Cor. 5:9-11).
- This section begins with a description of wicked hypocrites who have sought the favor of men by attending the place of holiness (probably the Temple in Jerusalem). These hypocrites wanted to be remembered for good, but their memory perished in

the city where they did these works. Solomon has spoken before that the memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot (Pr. 10:7). Eccl. 1:11; 2:16 reveal that both the righteous and the wicked will be forgotten ultimately; however, the frustration here is that the façade of the wicked will be forgotten. The wicked will not only be ultimately judged by God, even though they fooled those whom they passed while going to or met in the holy place, but they will also be forgotten under the sun. This is the vanity.

- Another frustration is the delaying of an appropriate punishment to a wicked man. When civil authorities do not execute their judgment quickly (they bear the sword—Rom. 13), the wicked are emboldened to continue in and multiply their evil deeds. The opposite conclusion is that speedily executed edicts of justice deter crimes and wicked deeds. Furthermore, when an evil man’s heart is emboldened to do evil, and even though he were to continue his evil deeds for a long time, Qohelet comforts his young student by telling him that, “I know that it will be better with the God-fearers who are reverent before God’s face.” The normal course of Providence in this life is that the righteous shall live long (Ps. 91:16) and that the wicked shall be cut off early in life.
- Deut. 4:40: *You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that you may prosper, you, and your children after you, and that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.* Psalm 37:18-19: *The Lord knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time.*
- Although one can never know whether a good man will always receive good, Qohelet lets us know that overall and certainly in the end, it will go better with the righteous than with the wicked. Paul says in Rom. 2:6-10 that eternal life is reserved for those who patiently continue to do good (only the regenerate can do God before God). To the rest, God’s indignation and wrath awaits them. Isaiah says, “Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be done to him.” (Is. 3:10-11) Qohelet says that Providence doesn’t usually permit the days of the wicked to be long. He refers to their days as being the opposite of that of a shadow. A shadow, in this context, lengthens as the world turns and the day goes forward. As the sun goes down, the shadow gets longer and longer. The daily shadow scenario gives us the symbol of long life here. This long life is not the normal course of Providence to the wicked.
- Insurance companies issue higher life insurance and auto insurance rates to young and single men. Studies have proven that unmarried men live more recklessly, and perhaps more wickedly, and do indeed lose their lives statistically sooner. Married men tend to be more stable, and protected from life’s harms (e.g., getting shot in a bar). Married men are usually cared for by their wives, in addition, married men have responsibilities and commitments that extend beyond themselves.
- BUT! These scriptural promises of blessing to the righteous and curses to the wicked notwithstanding, God will glorify Himself. To achieve His own glory, the righteous man may die young, and the wicked man may live long. This will not be the normal course of Providence; however, Qohelet, when finding this situation, became sorely

frustrated. Solomon has told us before that he has observed this same frustration (Eccl. 7:15).

- The prophet Malachi addressed the people who had succumbed to thinking in an evil manner about God's Providence. (Mal. 3:13-15; also note 16-18) "Your words have been harsh (strong) against Me, says Yahweh, yet you say, what have we spoken against You, You have said, it is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the Yahweh of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are built up; they even tempt God and go free." Those who were serving God in their ceremonial worship were frustrated to see that Yahweh seemed to bless both the wicked and the just. They were vexed to the point of sinning in heart against Yahweh. They forgot that God makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:45). All of this is in the context of obeying the command to love one's neighbor, even those who are evil.
- We need to note that the scope of this judgment is temporal in nature, for we know that no wicked man will inherit the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). On the other hand, we do know that the wicked man may have a wonderfully pleasurable life under the sun, while the righteous man must endure poverty and oppression. May the Lord be glorified. We see this depicted in Jesus' story of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk. 16:19-26). Since Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom, it can be assumed that he was a righteous man who was a beggar, sick, and miserable. The rich man was an evil man who had all the good things of this life. God's just judgment prevailed at the appointed time—at the end of each one's life and not during the life of these two. God's justice is just and is meted at the appointed time.
- Let us always fear God and keep His commands while we continually nurture the hope of glory. Be we, poor or rich, sick or strong, high or low, should be godly and content that we might inherit the Kingdom of God.

### 3. Resolve 5: Enjoy your days of God-given life 8:15

**Verse 15 So I commended enjoyment, because nothing is better for the man under the sun than if [he were] to eat, and to drink, and to enjoy. Then joy will accompany him in his toil [during] the days of his life that God gave to him under the sun.**

- Qohelet says that one can't escape good days and bad days, and that one can't escape death itself. Man who lives is on a trajectory toward death. This trajectory, if truly understood, weighs heavily on the wise man, even though he may live in hope of glory. Even the wise man is without a clue as to when his days will be over. So, does he spend his days in woeful laments? Does he spend his days fretting that the wicked go free and the righteous are falsely accused and perhaps executed? Does the wise man moan forever because the wicked seem to live long and the righteous perish early in their days? NO! For the fifth time, in order to bring comfort and resolve to the living, Qohelet commends joy. JOY! In light of living life in the light of an inevitable death, the wise man should be eating, and drinking, and enjoying in his life. In this manner, joy will accompany the man throughout his toil-filled life.

- One cannot spend his life in horrid frustration about his finiteness or his mortality. One cannot forever worry about the way things will be after him. As Jesus said, “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his height.” (Matt. 6:27) In other words, we cannot control or change what God has decreed. We shall all leave life under the sun. Let us enjoy the life given to us. Let us be eating, drinking, and enjoying our occupations to the glory of God. This resolve ends the fifth wave of frustration and the fifth suggested resolve.

#### **4. Again, man cannot know God’s entire scheme being worked out in Providence 8:16-17**

**Verse 16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to see the labor that is worked on the earth, indeed [I noted that] man sees no sleep day or night. Verse 17 Then I saw all of the work of God, for the man cannot find out thoroughly the deed that is worked under the sun, in spite of the man’s labors to seek [it] out, he could not find [it] out thoroughly, and moreover, if the wise man says he knows, he can not find [God’s work] out thoroughly.**

- A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps (Pr. 16:9). A wise man, according to Solomon, can wisely chart a diligent and successful course, but God will govern and preserve his life. The man can never know God’s overall plan. A man can never know how all things in the created universe are interrelated, interdependent, and how they are integrated to work as they do.
- Solomon gave himself to observe all occupations under the sun. He concludes that men labor out of envy and due to a desire to consume (as we noted earlier). Solomon noted that men labor continuously. He concludes after observing all that men occupy themselves continually, leaving no time for sleep day or night, that neither he nor other men could determine God’s overall scheme. Though even he, let alone a wise man, sought for the overall plan, he could not find it.
- If a man were to discover God’s secret plan, then, perhaps, he could live a life so in tune with that plan that he could ensure success and even, perhaps, escape death. Only God knows the overall scheme. The secret things belong to God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deut. 29:29)
- The Gnostics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD sought the secret knowledge of God. Spurred on by pagan Greek fantasies of knowing the supreme being through asceticism and worship rites, these Gnostics sought a level of enlightenment that transcended their nominal Christian brethren. They thought that if they were to fast, perform secret rites, and contemplate with the best Gnostics, then they could achieve the overall scheme of God. The earlier pagan Greeks sought to do the same thing with their gods, the Fates. If one were to understand how the Fates think and govern, then one could avoid misery and behave in a way conducive to prosperity. This carried over into the early Christian church. John refuted them in his epistles. The earlier creeds helped to destroy the rest of these doctrinally perverted churchmen.
- The Gnostics were prideful. Remember knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. Many sessions, pastors, or elders may fall into the category of those who think that they

know God's ultimate way, or that they know what is the best strategy for man life under the sun. The gullible will always believe the chatter of those puffed with knowledge and what a following they make for their self-appointed idols. Qohelet reminds us that no human can know God's overall way. God did show His ways to Moses (Ps. 107:), but even Moses mentions that the secret things belong to God alone. Qohelet reminds us that even if a wise man were to say, "I know God's way," one should rest assured that that wise man does not really know. God, for His own glory, has decreed, and does govern and preserve all of his creation, including the events of every man everywhere. All things are in the hands of our most merciful Father in heaven.

## 5. God has ordained that death comes to all 9:1-3

**Chapter 9 verse 1 So, all of this I took [into] my heart to explain, that the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God, whether love or hate, [while] the man never knows the all that is before him. Verse 2 All is the same, which comes to everyone; a common providential end to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good and to the ceremonially clean and to the ceremonially unclean and to the one sacrificing and to him who does not sacrifice. As the good man, so the sinner, the one swearing and the one fearing to swear. Verse 3 This misery is in everything that is accomplished under the sun: indeed, the same providential end is to all; moreover, the heart of the sons of man is full of evil, and madness is in their hearts during their lives and afterwards: death.**

- Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish (Ps. 146:3-4). Death abruptly or suddenly ends the God-given portion one possesses under the sun. This is the inevitable culmination of a man's life, which has been until that time filled with uncertainty. All of this along with death is part of the frustration to which God has subjected the creation. He has done this to gather His elect into His Kingdom.
- This uncertainty of life begins at birth. What a man will be, where he will live, what he will do, if and when he will love or hate is all in the hands of an almighty, sovereign God. K&D quote Ewald, "Since man has not his actions in his own power, he knows not whether he will love or hate." Acts 17:26 records that God "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him..." This is Paul's declaration of the one true God's holy, wise, and powerful governing and preserving all His creation. All the details God does know. A man, however, cannot know these things fully. God's providential hand in a man's life remains, for the most part, a mystery. K&D: "Every possible thing may befall a man—what actually meets him is the determination and providence of God. The determination is not according to the moral condition of man, so that the one can guide to no certain conclusion as to the other."

- Perhaps this is why Solomon, in Eccl. 4:2, records his praise of the dead (for they are through with this toil and unpredictable misery leading to death) and, moreover, praises those who had never been born, those who have never started this uncertain journey.
- The common denominator in the life of everyone alive is death. All men, whether righteous or wicked, will die. This section is dealing with the fact that physical death will come to all. Certainly, this is the result of man's fall in the garden as previously taught.
- Qohelet describes the spectrum of mankind and concludes that God leads them all to a common end. The spectrum of mankind falls into the major categories of those who please God and those who do not. The ones who fear God die—those who were in covenant with God in Christ (in type) in the old testament, who are ceremonially clean, who sacrifice unto Yahweh, and who take careful vows in His name. Meanwhile, the ones who disregard God will die—those who were outside the covenant community (or hypocrites within the visible church), who are wicked, unclean, who do not sacrifice, and who spend no time thinking about vows to God. The one fearing to swear is not one who has a biblical approach to God and doesn't want to swear for fear of breaking the vow. No, these are those who hold swearing before God in contempt—they don't do it.
- God extends a grace to all: to the elect, saving grace; to the reprobate, common grace; to all men, the grace to live and experience both good and misery.
- God enacts the same providential end to all, namely death. Men must resign themselves for this, live their life in light of it, and prepare their posterity for it (inheritance).
- We close here with verse 3, which declares that the heart of reprobate men, implied, is full of evil, and that madness is in their heart, which manifests itself in folly. **NONETHELESS**, everyone's life abruptly ends in death regardless of their morality. Even the Hebrew construction of this sentence ends abruptly with a marking that is as sharp and signifying an end as does death itself. God has no doubt ordained death for all since the fall of Adam. Thank God for life in Christ Jesus. Death is very much an enemy of mankind. So how does one cope with this throughout their days in the earth?



## 6. Resolve 6: The living have a hope to glorify God and to enjoy Him in this life 9:4-10

<sup>Verse 4</sup> **Indeed, there is hope for anyone who is chosen to be alive—even the dog who lives is better than the dead lion.** <sup>Verse 5</sup> **For those who are alive know that they will die, but the dead know nothing and have no further reward, even their memory is forgotten.** <sup>Verse 6</sup> **Also, their love and their hate and their jealousy already has perished and there is not a portion for them in anything that happens under the sun ever again.** <sup>Verse 7</sup> **Go! Eat your food with joy, and joyfully drink your wine, for God already has favored your deeds.** <sup>Verse 8</sup> **Always let your clothes be white, and let not your head lack oil.** <sup>Verse 9</sup> **See life with a wife whom you love all the days of your pointless lives, for this is your portion in the lives and in the troublesome labor in which you toil under the sun.** <sup>Verse 10</sup> **All that your hand finds to work, work with your strength, for there is no work or overall scheme [to know], or knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.**

- Qohelet gives the frustrated one the answer for the sixth, and much more developed, time—eat, drink, and enjoy your life.
- Qohelet reveals here in this passage that the living still have a hope to enjoy their lives before their lives end in death. God rules over one's short life. Good and bad things come to everyone throughout this short life. Death is inevitable, but as long as one is alive, there is hope to embrace the teachings of the Preacher and enjoy one's life.
- A dog that is alive, which was the most detested creature of all Israel, was better than a lion, the most noble creature of the forest (Pr. 30:30), which is dead. Scriptures portray the dog as a voracious, filthy beast, roaming about without a master is the proverbial emblem of that which is common, or low, or contemptible (possible exception—shepherd's dog Job 30:1) (c.f., dog's head—2 Sam 3:9; a dead dog—1 Sam 24:15) Longman notes that this statement of hope is a sarcastic or bitter reference. While modern Western cultures prize their canines, the OT imbibes the ancient Near Eastern attitude that they are dirty, horrible animals. They are wild, live on garbage, and will eat cadavers if given an opportunity. The point is that it is better to be alive and enjoying life than it is to be dead. Yes, Solomon reveals that those living know that death is coming, but even that is better than already being dead, for the dead know nothing. Solomon is not purporting soul sleep among the dead. He is simply saying that the dead have no part, nor portion under the sun anymore, therefore they know nothing about that which occurs under the sun. This revelation completely refutes the false doctrine of reincarnation. At death, the righteous dead go to be with Christ, and the wicked dead are immediately inflamed with torments. See WCF Chapter 32 (State of men after death) and 33 (The Final Judgment).
- Even though the memory of the righteous is blessed, both the wicked and righteous dead will eventually be forgotten by those under the sun. Once death has closed the chapters of one's life, all of that one's passions cease. They're plans, hopes, and dreams cease. All of the vitality of life ceases, therefore, while there is life flowing in our veins, there is a hope to enjoy our portion under the sun that God gives us.

- Remember that Qohelet speaks only of life under the sun. True, the Christian has a hope beyond this life, however, that's not the scope of his writing. It seems that Qohelet is preaching the vanity of life under the sun to nurture men in the everlasting gospel: Fear God and give Him glory." Rev. 14:6-7
- In light of man's limited knowledge of all things and the assured sentence of death, Solomon, the wisest man until Christ, strongly commands a man in verse 7 to go, eat your food with joy, and joyfully drink your wine, for God has favored your deeds.
- For the sixth time, Qohelet stops his discourse to now command his young student of Yahweh to go forth and enjoy the life that Yahweh gives under the sun. Longman says that Qohelet "admonishes his hearers to waste no opportunity or expense to seize whatever good things life has to offer. He tells them to put on their best clothes and refresh themselves with oil." Solomon has already taught that enjoyment of life comes from Yahweh, Himself. If any man is enjoying the life that he has, he should stretch his hands heavenward and thank God. For enjoyment of one's portion is the gift of God (Eccl. 5:18-19). This is the second time in this section (Eccl. 8:2-9:12), dealing with the fact that God rules over men's lives, wherein Qohelet exhorts men to enjoy their days (8:15 and 9:4-10).
- Since Qohelet commands enjoyment, it should be assumed that one can experience this enjoyment. If this is true, that a man can enjoy his occupation under the sun, then Yahweh has favored the man's deeds. This is a very important portion of 9:7. God has found the man's deeds acceptable in His sight and has therefore given the man the gift of enjoying his portion under the sun. This section is not saying that God commends a works righteousness, to the contrary, Solomon is teaching that if one goes forth and joyfully drinks one's wine, then one's works have already been favored, or accepted, by the Lord as pleasing. This word, "favored," is rendered, "accepted," in Lev. 1:4. The word, "favored," in this passage is a kin to Pr. 18:22: He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from Yahweh. When one has found a good wife, he can rest in the grace that he has been looked upon favorably by the Lord. This passage is important to us since we cannot know what God will do. We can know that if we are enjoying our lives that He has given us, then we are the favored of the Lord. Enjoyment of life is comforting knowing that it is a gift from Yahweh.
- Verses 8-10 broaden the man's sphere of enjoyment beyond that of simply eating, drinking, and general enjoyment. The man who is wise will be dressed in white, the color of rejoicing and of righteousness (Some say that the white here reflects purity Rev. 7:14). This same wise man will continually anoint his head with oil. The Middle Eastern wise man would wear white to reflect the heat of the environment and oil to soften and to brighten the skin. Fragrant oil is one of the heart-refreshing things note K&D (Pr. 27:9). They add that oil makes the face shine (Ps. 104:15). K&D: "This oil ought not to be wanting on the head, and thus the perpetuity of a happy life should know no interruptions."
- It should be noted, however, that sackcloth and ashes and clothes of mourning are familiar attire to the wise, however, the wise have learned to expect death during life, yet can still rejoice in the life given them by God in the midst of inevitable death.
- Qohelet commands the wise young men to see life, experience it, with a wife. Get married and enjoy life. Put off frustration and misery. Two are better than one as

earlier taught. Life is full of toil and eating, drinking, finding joy in all things and doing all of this with a wife is one's portion from the Lord. You can't know God's scheme and you are going to die someday, therefore, see life with a wife. Don't spend your days in frustration and misery—get married and enjoy it. Don't worry! Glorify God and enjoy him and life he gives you with a wife. The Jewish Midrash (*Koheleth Rabbah*) says, "A man who has no wife lives without good, help, joy, blessing, and atonement."

- Furthermore, as you are enjoying your life and your wife, stay busy, be diligent, labor with your mind and your hands until you die. Qohelet never condones a life of gluttony, drunkenness, idleness, and pleasure. He promotes God-glorifying behavior and joy. Ginsburg has rendered this verse, "Whatever thine hand findeth to do, whilst thou art able, do it." Use all of your mental and physical strength to glorify God in your works, your occupations. For there will be no eating, drinking, rejoicing with a wife, or working when you leave this life. It's all over. Yes, you'll be in glory, but you will have forfeited the goodness of God that you could have known this side of heaven, and Solomon says that you should care about this life and that you should do what he says and enjoy your life accordingly and teach your children to do the same. K&D note that Qohelet promotes the joy and fruit of labor throughout his book as a gift from God above (2:24; 3:13). Qohelet says to take advantage of and be diligent regarding every opportunity afforded to you.
- And, while you are alive, you do have a hope to embrace this teaching and do it, for you do not know when you will die. K&D note Hitzig: "Long ago God has beforehand permitted this thy conduct, so that thou has no room for scruples about it." Even though you find this enjoyment, you must, however, realize that it will not outweigh the meaninglessness of life under the sun.

## 7. One will never know when his life will end 9:11-12

**Verse 11** I have seen something else under the sun, that the race is not to the swift ones, nor the battle to the strong ones, and also not to the wise—food, and also not to the clever—rich abundance, and also not to the learned ones—favor, but time and the providential hand of God (occurrence) happens [to] all. **Verse 12** Moreover, man does not know his hour. As the fishes are caught in a cruel net, or as the birds are grasped in a bird trap, so the sons of men are entrapped by a miserable time as it befalls them unexpectedly.

- Romans 9:1-10:13 reveal that Providence drove Paul to God's grace whereas Providence drove Qohelet to frustration. Qohelet is preparing his readers for the everlasting gospel (Fear God and Keep His commands) just as the Apostle Paul drove His listeners to the foot of the cross of Christ. Jesus said that if one were to do these things that he would live eternally (Matt. 19:16-22 [rich man]; Luk. 10:25-28 [lawyer]). Qohelet's message drives men to the end of themselves that they may see that all is meaningless and abstract without God's grace in Christ.
- Those who watch the normal course of Providence (that's why we have psychological profiles, statistical norms, expectations, and risk management) know that swift people win races, that battles are won by strong and powerful forces, that wise people have

enough to eat, and that clever (smart) people are abundantly rich, and that the public favors intelligent people. The normal occurrences of all these events notwithstanding, God is the governor of all events and may choose to allow the turtle to win the race, He may allow the English to beat the Spanish Armada, He may allow an ignorant man to fare sumptuously, He may allow a fool to be wealthy beyond imagination, and He may (at the risk of frustrating many) permit an utter idiot to be exalted and publicly favored worldwide. God reveals to us that we should be wise, clever, diligent, and swift (if we want to win a race), but that does not guarantee the intended end that we would desire. God's scheme will prevail to His own glory. A man never knows the time when he is performing his greatest good. He never knows if his goals will be reached. He must plan. He must, according to James 4:13-15, say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But, a man must not boast against God's providential hand. Again, James, the brother of Christ, says that this boasting is arrogant and evil. God's Providence happens to all, and that is why the race is won by God's man. The battle is won by God's man. The money and food goes to God's man. And exaltation comes from the Lord, He raises one up and brings another down.

- As men live their lives, God ordains the events of their lives to His glory and no man knows, in advance, the day of misery, nor the day of his death. These things, although known to occur, come without warning. The day of death, here referred to as "a miserable time" comes as suddenly as does death comes to fish which are trapped in a net, or as birds which are caught. The ultimate misery, death, comes when men least expect it, therefore, to live as if one is outside the hand of Providence is a life of blind folly and wickedness. Longman: "People remain unaware until the last moment that the end is upon them, and this colors their enjoyment of the present."
- Although a wise man may understand Providence, he doesn't understand God's grand scheme. He does, however, know that God's decree is unchangeable. A wise man realizes that he'll never attain the all-knowing wisdom that he desires. Given the parameters of his wisdom, the wise man resolves to know what he can know (what God reveals); and to enjoy his life, his occupations, and his wife; and to live in a manner that exhibits joy while taking good days with bad ones and knowing that the day of death will one day come.

#### **D. Recapitulation of the benefits and the frustrations of wisdom 9:13-11:6**

##### *A wise man understands that:*

- Section three has taught that wisdom is beneficial, that man will never be as all-knowing and wise as God, and that man must understand that God rules over all. This section concludes with what some call a group of miscellaneous proverbs and anecdotes regarding wisdom. To the contrary, here, Qohelet recapitulates the benefits and the frustrations of wisdom under the sun. One will find that in this section Solomon summarizes most all of which he has discussed in his Ecclesiastes.

## 1. Wisdom, although belittled and forgotten, is greater than might 9:13-18

**Verse 13** Moreover, this wisdom I saw under the sun and it [made a] great [impression upon] me. **Verse 14** A small city with few people in her, and a great king came against her and surrounded her and he built huge siegeworks against her. **Verse 15** And in her was found a poor wise man, and he, even he, rescued the city with his wisdom, but mankind remembered not that poor wise man. **Verse 16** And I said, “wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded. **Verse 17** Words of wise men in quietness are better heeded than the cry of the one ruling fools. **Verse 18** Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinning destroys much good.

- Solomon begins this recapitulation with an anecdote illustrating that wisdom is better than strength. Solomon, being a king, uses the royal office as an example perhaps showing that these principles apply to both those in a low estate and those in a high estate.
- Solomon is truly impressed by this example of wisdom. He sees a city surrounded by a great and awesome adversary. The odds are against the city. The city, which is near to being overtaken, is saved from death and destruction by the wisdom of a poor wise man. Salvation comes to the city and to its people by an insignificant, lord of nothing. The poor wise man arose to the occasion and potently used his wisdom to rescue the city.
- After the rescue accomplished in wisdom, the words of this poor wise man are not heeded. In fact, they are despised. The city, who, perhaps, rejoiced in the deliverance of the city by virtue of the poor wise man’s wisdom, now brushes off the poor wise man and belittles his wise words. Furthermore, although he wrought a great deliverance, the poor wise man is forgotten in history and remembered no more. We are reminded of the fleeting nature of popularity in Eccl. 4:13-16 regarding the poor youth who ascends from poverty to kingship. The people rejoiced in him for the moment, but successor generations forgot him regardless of how great he was. Longman rightly notes that “in the short run, the wise man’s actions were significant, but in the long run they disappeared in the oblivion of passing time.”
- We conclude here that wisdom and its affect is fleeting. Yes, it brings temporal greatness, deliverance, and prosperity, to name a few things, but one cannot ride a wave of popularity and prosperity forever just because one is wise. Wisdom has no ultimate end under the sun. It too fades, for people in general forget wise things accomplished or said, they become jealous, a better idea comes along, the wise commit foolish errors or sins and are demoted in esteem and/or estate, and/or the wise man dies. But, it is better to be a poor, wise, unpopular, lowly esteemed wise man than a pompous and paraded fool. Don’t envy the popular fool. His life is not what it seems, and God is not pleased with him. Fear God and keep His commandments.
- To encourage the point that wisdom is better than might, Solomon declares that although wisdom may be despised, it is still greater than brute force. He has already taught us that wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of a city (7:19).
- Qohelet has taught us before that it is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than the song of fools, and that the laughter of fools is like the crackling of weeds in the fire

under the pot—lots of sparks and smoke, but no heat. (7:5-6). Solomon speaks here in our passage that wisdom is better than weapons of war. Weapons of war provide a defense. Solomon has taught in Eccl. 7:12 that wisdom is a defense, a protective shade, a shadow. Furthermore, he taught us there that wisdom gives its possessor an advantage—life. Those who despise wisdom, love death (Pr. 8:36).

- So, although it is fleeting, belittled, and forgotten, get wisdom and understanding, use it at its appropriate time, and prosper by it. To expect anything more from wisdom will bring frustration.
- Qohelet now makes a turn from summarizing the excellencies of wisdom to describe the damage that error and folly can do to even the wise and their good works. The turn begins here in verse 18a. A sinner is described as one who destroys much good. Good reputations, good works, good words, can all be neutralized by the folly of one who is sinning, whether it be a wise one or a fool. As Qohelet has taught earlier, Surely oppression destroys a wise man’s reason, and a bribe destroys the heart. We see here how much damage a little sin can wreck even in the lives of the good and wise. Paul says of sin in the Corinthian church, “...a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” (1 Cor. 5:6) Solomon goes on to make his point more clear.

## **2. A moment of folly ruins a lifetime of wisdom 10:1**

**Chapter 10 Verse 1 [As] dead flies give a bad smell [to] and ferments the oil of the one mixing oil, weighty more than wisdom and honor is a little folly.**

- Qohelet reveals that the stench flowing from the bubbling fermentation of a few dead flies in sweet smelling oil, is overwhelming compared to the greater volume of sweet smelling oil. A little stink goes a long way to cover the sweetest smell. Qohelet presses the point, through this vivid example, that a little folly from one known for wisdom and honor, is as a bad stench that cloaks the good—no matter how good and honorable that wise man is.
- Reformed pastors, such as Rev. Baxter, have always counseled younger pastors to let the comedians tell the jokes, but you preach the Word of God. These pastors are responding to the all too common situation where a pastor, because of a personal dearth of theological knowledge, relies upon jokes and humorous anecdotes to inspire and humor the congregation. Qohelet here is revealing the power that a little folly has to all but ruin the wisdom and honor of a wise and dignified man. A little foolish behavior, or as some call, “letting your guard/hair down,” is more weighty with regard to character than that of wisdom and honor. Folly can ruin a wise man’s reputation, which is as gold and silver, forever. As Qohelet taught earlier, A good name is better than precious oil (Eccl. 7:1). So, wise men are here put on notice to guard their thoughts, words, and deeds against folly, or foolish behavior, lest they be classed with the fools themselves. One can re-read Eccl 7 to see the distinctions between those who are wise and those who are fools—the men of folly.

### 3. Fools are clearly manifested as fools 10:2-3

**Verse 2 A wise heart is to his right, but [the] heart of the fool is to his left. Verse 3 Even as the fool is walking on the road, lacking power of mind, he says to everyone [that] he is a fool.**

- Qohelet has taught us in Eccl. 2:14 that the wise man walks with perception whereas the fool stumbles in darkness. A wise man is known by his thoughts, words, and works, and a foolish man is known by the same. This passage reveals how that both the wise man and the fool are manifested by their ways.
- The ancient world made a distinction between good and evil by stating that good was on the right side and that evil was on the left. We note Christ's words, "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels... (Matt. 25:33-34, 41)" Here right is clearly good, and to be on the left is clearly bad.
- The wise man is the good man. He is the man that has the greatest propensity to have a good life under the sun. The wise man's heart turns from folly, even a little bit, and is upright. The fool's heart is always evil. He has no fear of God in his heart. He stumbles through life in darkness making the same mistakes over again. By his ways of folly, the fool reveals that he blindly walks through life. Although a world of fools applaud those who are foolish, the wise man can see the fool's folly. What is esteemed by a foolish world is an abomination to God.
- Pr. 18:2 reveals that a fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart. Fools despise wisdom and true education. Fools believe that one is born intelligent. Fools know the whole scheme of life under the sun—just ask them. Fools don't know when to shut up. Even a fool is considered wise if he keeps his mouth shut. Solomon has experienced fools who speak swelling words endeavoring to prove that they are wise. Fools are fully convinced in their positions. They are self-deceived and thick. Every time they open their mouths, it is as if they are saying, "I am a fool, and everything that I'm saying is foolish."
- They who are spiritual, Christ's disciples of the Word of God, judge all things (1 Cor. 2:13-16). They rightly discern the voice of the wise and the shout of fools. Christians must obey Solomon's instructions regarding the getting and keeping of wisdom that they may be of those on the right—the wise in heart. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Christ is our wisdom from God. Wisdom is truly manifested in the one who fears God, believes in Christ, and obeys God's holy commandments in every realm of his life.

#### 4. One must remain calm in the midst of the unexpected 10:4-7

**Verse 4** If the anger of one ruling falls upon you, your post do not leave, calmness can lay to rest great sins. **Verse 5** There is an evil I have seen under the sun, an inadvertent sin arising from before the face of the ruler. **Verse 6** The fool is placed in the high positions, while many rich ones are occupying the low estate. **Verse 7** I saw servants on horses while princes were walking like servants on the ground.

- Pursue wisdom and do righteousness. Fear God and fear the king. Remember, even when one accomplishes these God-ordained deeds under the sun, trouble and chaos can come to the most wise of men. God ordains all that is under the sun. The wise man understands this truth and is flexibly wise to resolve what to do. Qohelet, as the wisest of all living rulers provides wisdom regarding protocol when dealing with the king.
- If, while performing one's duties, one is subjected to the ruler's wrath, whether because of one's errors or not (meaning that one is innocent), Solomon provides the remedy to alleviate the misery—don't run from the king's presence. The king's wrath may here be unexpected. Nonetheless, Solomon has instructed before in Eccl. 8:2-5 that one should obey the king because he is sovereign and does what he wills. He has warned not to stand for evil against the king. He also warned to not act presumptuously before the king since your life is in the balance as it stands before the king. Solomon provides proper protocol for the wise man as he addresses authority, particularly monarchial authority. The fool is unlearned, brash, and dangerously presumptuous regarding his position before authority. The fool says, "Well, he puts his pants on the same way I put mine on." Not realizing that dungeons were filled with such fools who wanted to presume to be the king's equal.
- Qohelet has said before that a soft answer turns away wrath (Pr. 15:1-2) and that the words of a wise man bring health (Pr. 10:31; Eccl. 10:12). Here, Solomon teaches that calmness and, if warranted, healing words can pacify great errors against the king. Pr. 17:27: He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. This is why it is important to be very articulate and weigh each word carefully when one ascends to heights of greatness whether in business, civil government, or the church. The foolish brash ones always remain on the lowest rungs of society because they are unpredictable, explosive, pugilistic, polemic, and rebels. Always approach authority in humility; always pacify anger with healing words and a calm disposition. Handle unexpected wrath from individuals in this manner. It's your life under the sun. Spend it wisely and save yourselves years of trouble.
- Qohelet also instructs wisely that the unexpected can and does happen in society. He has taught in Eccl. 8:14 that there are times when the just get what the wicked deserve and that the wicked get the prosperity that should go to the faithful righteous. What's frustrating this side of the sun is that God ordains these unexpected paradigms for His own glory. Here in this passage, the upside down world is attributed to the unexpected and unintentional sin of the ruler.
- When the ruler or ruling bodies make unpremeditated errors of judgement or sins, many must suffer as the result. This is why sins of rulers are more heinous in the



sight of God than are sins of more common folk (see Q83 of WCF Shorter Catechism.). Due to the breadth of their sovereignty and their administration, rulers do inadvertently sin by making foolish choices regarding judges, executors, legislators, and servants. These rulers could have received bad or corrupted information about persons under their control. Rulers may realize their sin after their choices are immutably appointed to a role and task. Solomon, most likely seeing or perhaps even committing these sins, sees the wise performing the work of servants and the servants in the positions normally reserved for and occupied by the wise.

- Solomon has spoken by inspiration of God before about a “topsy-turvy” society: Pr. 19:10 and 30:21-22.
- Because of the grave ramifications of the ruler’s unintentional sins, Qohelet refers to this topsy-turvy societal faux pox as a most miserable frustration. The ramifications of this sin are a great misery to the ruler, the wise, the servants, and the people. Nonetheless, this as well as other unexpected events under the sun must be treated with calmness of spirit and wise words lest, as Eccl. 10:20 points out, we bring condemnation upon ourselves for our cursing.

### 5. Wisdom, courage, and timing bring success 10:8-11

**Verse 8 One digging a pit may fall into it, and one breaking through a wall, a snake may bite him. Verse 9 One quarrying stones may be hurt by them, one splitting trees may be endangered by them. Verse 10 If the iron ax head is dull and its edges are not sharpened, then he must use more strength, but [the] advantage of wisdom is success. Verse 11 If the serpent bites before it is charmed, then there is no advantage for the charmer.**

- Qohelet, having instructed on unexpected miseries, now expounds upon the uncertainties of life in general. There are risks to living and venturing to work any work; real, paralyzing risks. Risks by which one could be killed, yet, Qohelet goes on to mention that one must work wisely and in a timely manner to gain success.
- Solomon has taught that God’s decree is unchangeable. He has also taught that man cannot know comprehensively as God knows. These two truths introduce uncertainty and risk associated with man’s sojourning here under the sun. The lazy fool is paralyzed by this uncertainty and reacts to this frustration by folding his hands and consuming his own flesh (Eccl. 4:5). Pr. 26:13-16: The lazy man says, “There’s a lion in the road! A fierce lion is in the plazas!” As a door turns on its hinges, so does the lazy man on his bed. The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl, it wearies him to bring it back to his mouth. The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.
- The risks of life should not paralyze one with inactivity. The wise man seeks to know his risks and with a heart of courage ventures forth to prosper in the midst of uncertainty because the benefits do indeed outweigh the costs. He must toil to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, subdue, and rule it to the glory of God. The wise man carefully, methodically, prudently, and courageously advances toward success.

- If one digs a hole, he could fall into it. If one tears down a wall, a snake may bite him. If one uses a bulldozer to move earth, he could bury himself or at least endanger himself. If you drive to work, a tire could fly off of a semi-tractor trailer, hit your windshield, and kill you. So what do you do? You mitigate the risk. Occupy yourself carefully in your life. Proceed through life with caution. As stated earlier, the wise man contemplates the risks and dangers associated with all of his works. The wise man walks uprightly with his eyes open. By taking precautions, the wise man manages and endeavors to reduce the risks associated with life under the sun.
- Longman quotes Roland Murphy who says that verse 10 is dealing with a “saying about the wise use of one’s abilities.” Since Solomon has taught that life is both toilsome and risky, he also teaches that when one works wisely, using his mind as well as his hands, he will fare better toward success. Since one must labor, let him do it wisely not making extra work for himself. Work smarter, not harder is today’s rendition of this proverb. Qohelet is saying that wisdom will bring success just as the use of a sharpened ax will accomplish the logging job. The fool, however, will struggle through life always laboring the most difficult way because he is devoid of wisdom—the better way. Without wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of God, life’s toils are made that much more difficult. Wisdom, although not guaranteeing success all the time, has the advantage that it normally secures success according to the normal course of Providence.
- Now, what good is a snake charmer after the snake has already bitten. Qohelet is here teaching his son/sons that wisdom in the performance of the appropriate works at the appropriate time (Eccl. 3:1-10) bring success. The wise man with his skills and capabilities meets the appropriate needs (family, church, govt.) at the appropriate time. Through his wisdom, the wise man endeavors to know the best course of action at any time, especially in his occupation—where’s the market need. The fool misses the cues of the world around him and always shows up late with the wrong response. It is like the fool who says I need not learn about technology because my current job doesn’t require it. Don’t let the risks of failure or destruction stop you from venturing to fulfill your command from God to be fruitful, to multiply, to replenish the earth, to subdue it, and to rule it. The fool is paralyzed with fear and laziness and does nothing. We speak more of this in Eccl. 11:4.
- You don’t know if your job will change next week or next year. You had better learn so as to mitigate your risk of failure. You had better work smarter to mitigate your risk of obsolescence. You had better, to the best of your calculating abilities, seek to meet the appropriate market needs at the appropriate time to be successful. March 1, 2000 is a bit late to try soliciting your company’s Y2K software solution. The wise men and women were thinking of that half a decade ago. If the serpent has already bitten, what good is the most eloquent of charmers.

## 6. Fools speak presumptuously regarding things they know nothing about 10:12-15

Verse 12 **The words of a wise man are gracious, but the lips of a fool consumes him.**

Verse 13 **[The] beginning of the words of his mouth is folly, and the end of [the words] of his mouth is madness and wickedness.** Verse 14 **And the fool multiplies words: a man knows not what will come, nor what will happen after him. Who can tell it to him?** Verse 15 **The toil of the fools weary them, he does not know [the way] to town.**

- Qohelet has already taught that it is better to hear the quiet words of the wise than to hear the songs and shouts of the fools. He here recapitulates the advantage of being wise and the folly of the foolish one.
- A wise man knows how to answer a matter appropriately. He finds the right words (typically a very few words) and seeks for the appropriate time to present them. He is gracious and not presumptuous in his approach. Subsequently, the wise man will eat well as a result of the fruit of his lips (Pr. 10:31-32). He grows in favor with God and with man. The brash and the foolish are not so. For example, one doesn't interrupt another early in the morning, late at night, or during eating times to babble about non-emergency items. These wisdom morsels should be taught as part of manners training. Words like, "please," "thank-you," "forgive me," and "I'm sorry I forgot." One is not compulsive just because one expects these gratuities. These gratuities should be expected of the wise and by the wise.
- Solomon proceeds to summarize the fool's operations and motives. The fool speaks too much. He rambles on and on saying nothing. One is pained when forced to listen to a fool. The fool begins with foolish talk and ends his discourse with foolish actions. If the fool is pugilistic, his discourse could incite a fight or hard feelings.
- Pr. 10:19-21: In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of heart (wisdom, courage, and graciousness).
- As a fool's idleness consumes his flesh (Eccl. 4:5), so his words consume him. The fool's every thought, word, and deed work to his own destruction. The mouth of the fool leads to destruction (Pr. 10:14).
- A fool presumes against God's sovereignty and his own mortality. His words assume a thorough knowledge of what will occur in the future. He boasts about what he will do tomorrow, not realizing that he may die tomorrow or that Providence will redirect him by virtue of a change of environmental events. We note the words of the fool and the resolve of James, the brother of Christ in James 4:13-17.
- The wise man understands his own mortality, God's sovereignty, and life's uncertainties, and thinks, speaks, and acts accordingly.
- Because the fool lacks this understanding, the fruits of his speech weary him. He must labor hard. He has not prepared for his work and cannot execute it excellently, therefore, he must toil for that which he gets.
- The fool speaks presumptuously not knowing the future. He speaks many words, the ramifications of which he has little to no idea. It were as if he didn't know the way to the city to accomplish his work. Solomon describes here that unknowing darkness

that clouds the eyes of the fool. The fool walks in darkness. The fool's work is harder than that of the wise who has sought to mitigate risks by learning and applying wisdom. One would think that the fool would mimic the wise man's efforts, but the fool usually only gets jealous of the wise man's success. The fool, who is quick to speak and quick to quit, doesn't have the stamina to continue pursuing wisdom and be successful.

## 7. The blessed nation has as its rulers, the wise 10:16-17

**Verse 16** Woe to you land in which your king is immature and [in which] your princes feast in the morning. **Verse 17** Blessed is the land in which your king is the son of noble ones and your princes eat at the [appropriate] time for strength and not for dissipation.

- Solomon warns us that there is something worse than the common fool—the foolish king. The Hebrew language here can be translated as literal, “child,” or figuratively, “immature.” Since Josiah the King of Judah was a good, eight-year-old king, I don't believe the context restricts the woe here to a land that has a chronologically young ruler. The woe here is pronounced on the land that has a presumptuous, immature ruler. The king's administration enjoys a drinking bout every morning. His administration is, perhaps, taken from among the uneducated, uncultured, and foolish, and not from among those of noble birth, who have been trained for great authority and wealth.
- Isaiah prophesies that God gives a nation women and children (lit. capricious ones) to rule over it when its ways continually are not according to His Law (Isaiah 3:4-5; 5:11). The rulers, in Isaiah, translated as, “children,” are literally “capricious ones” meaning these accursed rulers are impulsive, unpredictable, changeable, whimsical, variable, unreliable, fickle, and erratic. These rulers accomplish the wrong thing at the wrong time. They are a bane to the righteous. They can be an unexpected misery from the hand of God. A nation should be quick to repent and obey God's Law when it sees its rulers displaying these characteristics.
- Qohelet, the wise authority on rulers, declares his blessing on the nation who has, for its king, the son of nobility. Longman adds here that nobility here is being defined as not just that from birth, but also by disposition and custom. A wise ruler is like a refreshing drink to the nation (cf. Is. 42, Rom. 13, and read 2 Sam. 23:1-7 regarding David's last words about rulers). The people, who expect righteousness and justice from their rulers, can have their expectations met from a wise king. The wise king and the one's he appoints serve as servants of God, the bishops of the unregenerate, the sword holders of Yahweh. They judge, implement law, and feast appropriately. This great blessing is the opposite of the misery Qohelet described in Eccl. 3:16 (wickedness and iniquity); 4:1 (oppression), 13-14 (foolishness and arrogance); 5:8 (violent perversion of justice), and 10:4-7 (inadvertent sins and errors of judgment).
- We must remember that regardless of the ruler we have, Christ is the Lord of all lords and the executor of all justice. Jesus Christ's work on the cross was the objective work of God's justice necessary to secure eternal redemption. Ps. 2 reveals that Christ watches over the thoughts and behavior of the rulers of the earth. He is the

great Judge who judges righteously. Let our hope, therefore, be in Him for the ultimate execution of good.

## **8. Diligence, man's prized possession, makes one rich without sorrow 10:18-19**

**Verse 18** When there is laziness, the beamworks sag. And when [there is] negligence of hands, the house leaks. **Verse 19** For laughter, ones are making a feast, and wine makes [for] rejoicing lives, but money answers all.

- Qohelet returns to his warning against laziness. He reiterates Eccl. 4:5 by stating that the lazy man will experience entropy all around him. Not only will he go hungry, but all of his assets, whether owned, rented, or provided for free (e.g., government housing to the poor), will sooner or later fall apart because of a lack of diligence. Note the foolishness of sluggards in Solomon's proverbs: Pr. 10:4; 12:27; and 26:15.
- A wise man stewards his estate with the utmost of care. He endeavors to build it. The lazy man, on the other hand, is active, but idle with regard to productivity, therefore his estate withers away. This is what the beamworks sagging and the house leaking means. The idle fool does not oversee his property and he, therefore, loses it. He saves no money for maintaining of his property. He lives in such a manner that his most important asset, his home, falls apart before his eyes. Perhaps he spent so much money acquiring the house not realizing that 70 percent of the life-cycle cost of home ownership is in its maintenance.
- The point here, as stated earlier, is that man's prized possession is diligence. The hand of diligent makes one rich and God adds no sorrow to the blessings accrued to the diligent.
- All of a wise man's labors are for the glory of God, and temporarily speaking, for his and his posterity's consumption. As Qohelet has taught, all work is for one's mouth, either today, or in the future. He gives his time and skills for money. With this money he builds his estate, exchanging his cash for goods, services, investments, inheritances, gifts. A wise man can steward his property and leave an inheritance, but it all takes money. It takes money to enjoy the good in this life. Men all over the world trade time, goods, and services for time, goods, and services from other men.
- Solomon is teaching that, under the sun, money is the answer to all things. He has already taught that money is a defense against uncertainty. It's not if you spend it all. There is truth to the saying that there is no free lunch. And you should expect to pay for all labor and goods you receive from other people unless they freely offer it.
- Members of the visible church need desperately to understand this principle. We have the mistaken mentality that it is pious to expect people to work without pay within the visible church. The pressure is there to expect free service. We expect free preaching, free teaching, free maintenance, free musical talent. That cheap mentality wouldn't fly in the business world. It is interesting to note that the Bible refers to this as defrauding your neighbor. Some would say then that one would be peddling the gospel if one wanted to be paid for preaching and teaching, if one wanted compensation for the use of his education, research, and discipleship

capabilities, but Moses and Paul have taught that the laborer is worthy of his hire and that that hire should not be delayed.

- But brother Tritle, money isn't everything, for you know that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And besides, brother Tritle, doesn't the Bible clearly state that money can't buy ya love? Brother Pious, you are right about greed being the root of all evil, but Solomon is not talking about the love of money here. By the way, the Beatles wrote, "Can't buy me love." Qohelet dealt with greed in Eccl. 5:10-12. Qohelet has also taught that money is a defense (Eccl. 7:12). Here, Solomon is recapitulating that money is a resource with which one can hedge himself against the harshness and toil of this life. This is why we exchange money with one another for goods and services. With money we build civilizations, public waterworks, microwave ovens, stock markets, medicinal breakthroughs for healing disease. With money I can buy a home, conservatively invest, buy and stock food for our pantry, bless my wife and children and others with goods and services, and leave an inheritance. I can also buy insurance to hedge my family against my death. We should never hate money, or any other medium of exchange (e.g., gold and silver). It is a defense against uncertainty. The financial markets reveal to us that when uncertainty is high in the world, gold and silver prices go up. Investors want to hedge themselves against financial loss.
- Lets talk about the demands of God's Kingdom on earth. Money sends the preachers and missionaries freely to lands far away. Cash buys the buildings where disciples are made and where worship is held. Money pays for the study that enables theology to develop toward perfection. Money is what helps the deserving poor, the needy, the widows, and the orphans to have their needs met. Money enables there to be food in the storehouse of God. If you're not making money and giving it, then none of these Kingdom needs are met. To hope that these needs will be met while not working for and giving money is hypocritical according to James Chapter 2:14-26.
- We should want to secure as much money as we can for the time we spend laboring. That's why we affirm higher education and diligence and their benefits. So, if I want to laugh, I enjoy a feast. If I want to rejoice, I buy a good wine and share it with those whom I love. But, if I want an answer for everything under the sun, I find it in money. Money answers all of life's demands under the sun. Whether you are a believer or non-believer. Solomon said it while under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. You and I should believe it and enjoy the benefits in this life that money brings. I warned you that Ecclesiastes will penetrate your heart and challenge your thinking.
- In Nehemiah, what did the Levites do when the congregation didn't provide adequate support? They left their ministry work completely and went to work elsewhere. Nehemiah didn't chasten the Levites for being greedy and being concerned about money. He chastened the people for defrauding those who ministered the Word of God. Defrauding those who labor in the church of their hire is a horrible sin in the church. And, if we're not willing to pay, then we should never expect one to work. Being a servant is not a loop-hole for everyone's defrauding you. This would cause us all to re-evaluate what is necessary and what is frivolous regarding church activity. If you want to work for free for the church, fine, but don't place your scruple on the other laborers in the church. Jesus allows all to negotiate their price and He

condemns those who try to defraud (Matt. 20:1-16). Praise the Lord, many denominations have gained this understanding. According to Moses, one should never muzzle the ox when its laboring. Jesus, Himself, said that no one goes to war at his own expense.

## 9. Wisdom causes one to be slow to speak 10:20

**Verse 20 Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, or in your bedroom, do not curse the rich, because the bird of the air may carry the word, and another winged creature may report the matter.**

- In Eccl. 5:6, Qohelet taught that one should not allow their mouth to cause their flesh to sin. Here, Solomon, the wise expert regarding behavior around the king, teaches that one should never curse a ruler, even in his thoughts. To curse is to pronounce that which is condemnatory against an authority, whether in the family, the civil government, or the church. He is reiterating Moses' words in Ex. 22:28: You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people. Paul the Apostle references Moses' Law regarding rulers, even those in the church: You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. Regarding this command, the NGSB teaches that neither God nor the ruler whose authority comes from Him were to be reviled (i.e., slandered, maligned, vilified, cursed). We should remember that Qohelet has also taught that one shouldn't take up an evil cause against the king. In other words, regarding an all powerful rulership, one should not seek to mutiny. The modern militia movements are experiencing the wrath of Caesar because they are doing just that—cursing God-ordained authority.
- As the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 13, all authority is from God. Authority has its source in God. God even revealed this to the Pagan kings: through Daniel (Dan. 4:17; to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:34-35); to Darius (Dan. 6:25-27). Therefore, one should never be loose with their tongue regarding God's ordained authority, whether civil, ecclesiastical, or domestic. Authorities also must heed the same warning toward one another.
- This wisdom of Qohelet is the final passage dealing directly with kings. Solomon's teaches here that one should guard their words spoken about those who are in power. He is counseling the covenant community not to murmur against those in authority, whether politically (the king), financially (the rich), or ecclesiastically (the church officers). The consequence of one's murmuring against authority will be that one's murmuring will be discovered by those against whom the cursing and murmuring are directed.
- Qohelet's point here is that the murmuring will be discovered. He uses the metaphor of a little bird, which hears your words in secret, flying to tell your secret to the one against whom you are murmuring. This passage reveals that one cannot hide his murmuring thoughts or cursing words, even if one were to say them in his bedroom at night in the dark in the middle of the night. Murmuring and cursing of this sort, according to this wisdom, always has a way of finding its way to the ears of the one against whom you complain, or slander. Let us, based upon all of the knowledge

Qohelet has taught us regarding behavior toward authority, cleanse ourselves of all cursing in thought, word, and deed that our speech be seasoned with grace and salt.

### **10. Diversification reduces risk and leads to long-run success 11:1-6**

**Chapter 11 Verse 1 Send your bread upon the face of the waters, for after many days you will find it. Verse 2 Give a portion to seven and also to eight, for you do not know what misery may come upon the land. Verse 3 If the clouds are full, they release rain upon the land, and whether the tree falls to the south, or whether [it falls] to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will fall earthward. Verse 4 One watching wind will not sow, and one looking at the clouds will not harvest. Verse 5 Just as you do not know what is the path of the wind, [or] as bones fill the womb, so you cannot know [the] work of God, who works the all. Verse 6 In the morning, sow your seed, and at the evening do not let your hand rest, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both of them will do equally well.**

- Qohelet concludes his recapitulation of all that he has taught by clarifying to us the risks of life. He also provides us with the best counsel this side of heaven to mitigate the risk of misery and failure while living in the midst of frustration under the sun. He urges action instead of inactivity. Qohelet's counsel here is to diversify your investments in life, to content yourself with long-run returns, to be aware of the obviously predictable elements of life, to understand that there are uncontrollable variables (risks) in life, to know that all circumstances are God-ordained, and to venture forth and work while laboring diligently in many things.
- In verses 1 and 2, Qohelet teaches his son to diversify his investments in life and to content his self with long-run returns for those investments. Unlike the thoughts of many commentators regarding this passage, Solomon here is not teaching about giving to charity. Some have seen similar language here and in Is. 32:20 (Send the oxen freely) and in Deut. 15:10 (give to the poor and needy). The context, however, is after Eccl. 10:16-20 dealing with money being the answer to all and prohibitions against cursing authorities, and before a description of life's certainties and uncertainties (Eccl. 11:3-6). To hold that this verse speaks about giving to the poor is alien to the context.
- The ancient Hebrew reader would have understood the term, "sending, not casting, forth bread," as a maritime term. This phrase had to do with engaging in sea, or ocean-oriented commerce or trade. Sea-going trade was very risky, but very, very profitable. Multitudes of men and nations gained their great wealth through maritime trade. It promised more potential profit to the trader than did land-oriented trade in the market place. Maritime trade, although potentially profitable, had many risks associated with it. The trader who would send his good seaward bore the risk of a ship being destroyed by storms, sinking due to poor maintenance or fire, theft due to pirates and mutiny, and spoilage of goods due to long journeys.
- To alleviate the risks and to maximize the returns of maritime trading, Qohelet teaches that one should send a portion to seven, ships implied, and also to eight. Diversify the risks of sending one's cargo on one ship by sending the cargo on many ships.



- Solomon also points out that after many days, one would find their return for their investment. Implied here is that a profit would be present when the ships return from the buyers of the maritime trader's goods. Moreover, a greater profit could be secured from this maritime trade over that of land-oriented commerce, for, as Solomon has said, you don't know what misery, or disaster, could come upon the land (land-oriented trade implied). For example, there may be no need for, or money for, your goods in the country where you live. A higher price and greater profit may be secured from lands far away, however, you must bear a risk to get it there.
- Generally speaking, Qohelet's principle teachings here are to diversify your efforts—diversify your occupations to eliminate the risks of failure regarding your works under the sun. Don't be narrow in your skill sets. Be a good technologist. Learn the principles of business. Be able to teach youth. Be a multi-dimensional man vs. a narrow, technocrat that is so common today. Take advantage of the wisdom of this strategy before planning your college courses. Also, if physically possible, have many children, versus one. If one child dies, your heritage is gone. Spread your risks in your investments. The wise man understands the lesson of diversification.
- The wise man also knows that returns should be expected in the long run. Wise investors, when they formulate a sound strategy, stay the course. Short run returns are extremely risky (e.g., option trading in the stock market). Long-run returns may be less than short-run, highly risky returns, but they are more probable.
- Many fools long for the big, short-run hit. This is why the lottery is so popular—small investment, little risk, big potential return. They throw their money away with no calculation of risk and return. The fool, loving the shade and the wage, longs only for the uncalculated big hit. The broad range of large returns on investment have always been long-run returns. We see this in building an estate, child-rearing, obtaining an education, building a business, building a church and discipling members, and implementing a career course. No great return is quick and easy. Wise men diversify their occupations and wait for a long-run return. They stay the course amidst short-run blips (in the market, in the church, in education) against them. They are not tossed because of unsubstantiated short-run rumors.
- In verses 3-5, Qohelet describes two primary variables associated with production and commerce under the sun. First, there are known variables. These are variables are inevitable. The market place knows this information and uses it to satisfy individual buyer and seller positions. An example could be that the first of the year is tax refund time for many and that there will be a large amount of consumer cash available for buying goods and services. If a cloud is dark, it will most likely rain. Second, there are unknown market variables. These are variables that you don't know, or couldn't have known. For example, a nation with which you're doing business could, very quickly (i.e., in a day or two) financially collapse and destroy a potential market place. A tree, when cut, will fall. Where? It will fall to the north or to the south, but where it will fall, no one can tell. Therefore, hedge yourself.
- Many would say: Well that's it! I'm not engaging in commerce, I'll be a greeter at Meijers. There's too much risk out there. Well, perhaps next year, after Y2K, will be the perfect time to start my business or produce a new service. I'll start pursuing my technical or college education when things slow down around the house. Right! Time is passing. You're heading toward the grave. Your life will soon be over.

Risks are all around. Potential returns are awaiting the diligent, the venturesome, and the wise. You may now say, “I’ve learned to diversify and stick it out for the long run, but I’m paralyzed with fear of failure and uncertainty.” Welcome to life under the sun, young man.

- Solomon says if you’re waiting for the weather to be just right for planting, then, the probability is that you’ll never plant. He adds that if you’re frightened at every cloud that passes by, you’ll never harvest. A man’s heart can be locked in on eminent disaster. He fears failure, misery, and loss. Solomon wants a young man to know that after having counted the cost of venturing forth, one needs to venture forth. Risks can never be eliminated, only managed by diversification and avoidance (See Lk. 14:28 on counting the cost). If you’re waiting for the perfect, riskless day to launch your enterprise, you’ll never launch.
- Plant your seed in the morning, and, to avoid loss if the morning’s planting fails, plant your seed again in the evening. Hedge yourself. Engage in wise action to glorify God and mitigate the risk of failure.
- Qohelet adds that you cannot know all the variables associated with life. God works all things for His own glory. You know God’s total scheme to the extent that you know the origin and destination of the wind. You know Yahweh’s scheme as well as you understand how a child grows in its mother’s womb. In other words, you know very little. Life is dangerously risky. You could fail. You could die. You could worry from sunrise to sunset about all that could happen to your works. This uncertainty brings great frustration to the man laboring under the sun. Man must deal with: 1) his own mortality, 2) the risks of the futility to which God has subjected the world, and 3) the sovereignty of God. What should he do?
- Solomon exhorts the man lest he be paralyzed with fear. Get out of bed and labor in the morning. In the evening, don’t be idle. In other words, occupy yourself diligently throughout the day. Diversify your works (stay flexible in your skills) because you don’t know which works will prosper. Perhaps, God will prosper all of your works. The wise man will take this risk-mitigating wisdom to heart. This ends the recapitulation of those items about which the wise man thinks.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Resolve 7: Fear God and keep His commands early in life and throughout life 11:7-12:14**

- Qohelet has taught the people that: 1) life under the sun is the frustration of all frustrations; 2) that one should enjoy the good in all of his labors under the sun; and 3) that wise men fare better under the sun than do fools. We’ve also learned from the New Testament that God subjected all of creation to this frustration in the hope of glory. Christ, our Redeemer, paid the price of the cross, in obedience to the Father, to secure for His elect that promised glory. Christ, the wisdom of God, is the manifestation of the Word of God, of which Solomon speaks in Ecclesiastes. Christ, wisdom personified (See Pr. 1 and 2), cries out to the simple, even warning simple ones, that they must receive His wisdom or face certain calamity and ultimate death.
- We come to the conclusion of the book. This is also the recapitulation of all resolve found under the sun. Yes, life is frustrating, but not always. One should grasp this wisdom early before the days of old age come, when resolving frustrations seems to

become more difficult. For even the wise will encounter frustration, even the frustration of old age and death.

- Solomon now concludes that one should remember God early in life and throughout life. He is in essence teaching that one's everything is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever for as much time as possible before one dies. (cf. WCF SC Q#1)

### **A. Enjoy your youth 11:7-10**

**Verse 7 Sweet is the light, and pleasing to the eyes [it is] to see the sun. Verse 8 If, however, the man may live many years, in all of them, let him enjoy, but let him remember days of darkness, for many they will be, all which is coming is fleeting. Verse 9 Rejoice young man in your youth, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. And follow after the ways of your heart and after the sights of your eyes, but know that for all these, God will bring you to judgment. Verse 10 So, banish frustration from your heart, and cast off misery from your body, for youth and vigor are transient.**

- It is good to be alive and to take part in life under the sun. To live is to experience that which is sweet, like a lover's kiss. The soul is greatly pleased by creation and all that takes place under the sun.
- Qohelet has taught that one should find joy in his works and the fruit of them; find joy in his life; find joy in his children; find joy in eating, drinking, and merry-making; and find joy in the wife of his youth. All of these things in which a man is to take joy, are gifts from God. These are a man's portion under the sun.
- Although one finds the joy God intended in all these things, the wise young man must remember that all these joys are, at best, transient. They are temporal enjoyments even though one were to enjoy them for a long lifetime. Solomon teaches that enjoyment of all of God's gifts must be tempered by the thought that old age is coming. Furthermore, Qohelet teaches that the wise man must remember that he will be held accountable to God for all of his works of enjoyment. These two thoughts bring the proper and godly sobriety to a young man necessary for his sanctification and maturity in character (cf. Titus 2).
- Qohelet reveals that God permits men to follow their hearts to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. Of course, men will stand before Christ to give an account of all deeds done in the flesh (2 Cor. 5:9-11). Given these two parameters regarding the enjoyment of life, Solomon exhorts his young disciple to banish, or to put away, frustration, vexation, or sorrow from his heart and to cast away misery (some translations say, "evil," here) from his flesh. This command could have a connotation against asceticism (e.g., afflicting the flesh for religious reasons). Solomon has already taught young men that God accepts their righteous works and is not seeking for them to become more righteous than what He requires (see Eccl. 7).
- Solomon wants young men, those in the vigor of their youth, to enjoy life responsibly before a Holy God. His command in verse 9 is to rejoice, young man. Don't pollute your heart with misery and vexing frustration. Don't short-circuit your God-given gift of youth with sorrow and misery, for the days will come when you will be flooded with misery. The days will come when your vigor will diminish. The "prime

of life” will pass. The days will come when you will wish that you enjoyed to the full, to God’s glory, the glory days of your youth. Solomon says in Pr. 20:29 that the glory of a young man is their strength. He says here that that strength is not to be neutralized by frustration. Their strength is not to be neutralized worrying about life’s uncertainties. Young men are to learn about the risks and frustrations of life. They are to learn that they are mortal and finite regarding knowledge. They are to learn that days will come when their strength will be diminished or gone. They must learn that one day they will die. To understand these portions of wisdom, young men, and of course, women, must know God and His revelation revealed in His Word—the Bible. They must know Christ. They must be born again. Pray for your young men and for young men in general. If they fail to glorify God, the entire culture fails to glorify God.

## **B. Enjoy life in the fear of God before you die 12:1-7**

**Chapter 12 Verse 1 And remember the One [who] created you [while] in the days of your youth, before the days of misery come and the years when you will say, “there is no delight for me in them,” Verse 2 before the sun and light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain. Verse 3 In the day that the keepers of the house tremble, the men of strength stoop, and the ones grinding cease because they are few, and the lookers through the windows grow dim. Verse 4 When the doors to the street are closed, when the sound of the grinding fades, when he rises at the sound of a bird, and all the daughter of song grow faint. Verse 5 When they fear heights and terrors in the path, and the caperberry blossoms, and the locust drags himself along, and the desire is unstirred, then the man is going to his eternal home, and the ones mourning go about in the street. Verse 6 Before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken, and the jar is shattered at the spring of water, or the wheel at the well is broken. Verse 7 And he returns to the dust of the earth, from which it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.**

- After having counseled young men, in the prime of their lives, to enjoy their lives to the glory of God, he elaborates, in verses 1-7, on that to which he alluded in Eccl. 11:8, the coming dark days. The coming dark days, as contrasted with the days of youth and vigor, represent the scope and sense of this passage. Qohelet is about to expound upon the characteristic of the many days of darkness and misery that inevitably come upon those who are graced with long life. The frustration is still present under the sun as it was in the days of youth, but now they seem harder, or more difficult, to resolve, or to think about. Many try to resolve the frustration by wishing for the days of old (remember Eccl. 7:10), somehow thinking that those were better days. No, they weren’t better days, but, perhaps they were days of naivete, or days of greater mental and physical strength. The wise man must remember that nothing truly has changed. All things, in their essence, have remained the same.
- In this final resolve of the book, Qohelet is commanding that the young man rejoice in his youth, banish sorrow in his heart, and then remember your Creator while you’re young. Implied in this command is the exhortation to fear God, the beginning of wisdom, early in one’s life. The fear of God should be the first instruction of parents

to their children. Remember God. Be mindful of Him in thought, word, and deed. Meditate upon Him and His words early in life so that you may draw upon His wisdom throughout life, before you are conformed to this world and die in your sins. Matthew Henry has said, “It is the greatest absurdity and ingratitude imaginable to give the cream and flower of our days to the devil, and reserve the bran, and refuse, and dregs of them for God.”

- Know and remember God before days come when you’re overwhelmed with irreparable misery, confusion, and sorrow. Remember God, the Father of all comforts (2 Cor. 1) before days come, and they will, when you say, “I’ve lost my desire for them.”
- Embrace God and the testimony of His Son, Jesus Christ, who came to die for sinners and was raised and glorified for our justification. John the Apostle wrote the words of Christ who said, if you remain in my words, you shall be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. (Jn. 8:31-32).
- Qohelet speaks of one’s latter days as miserable, a dark cloud that has been in the furthest sight of the youthful man. He describes them, in general, as days of feebleness and sorrow. Solomon endeavors to prepare young men for their greatest frustration: old age and death. Every culture has sought to escape, to neutralize, or to damper these frustrations of mankind. The search for the fountain of youth, the holy grail, the ultimate hormone enhancer and hair rinse all have their root in wanting to ward off old age and death. To thwart this vain pursuit, Solomon has stated that just as strength is the glory of a young man, gray hair is the glory of an old man when found in wisdom (Pr. 20:29). He warns us, a final time here, to enjoy life in the fear of God before you grow old and die.
- Longman notes: “Once again we have a contrast between youth and old age. Youth is a time of life, enjoyment, and the possibility of connection with God (11:7-10). Old age faces death, does not have the possibility of enjoyment [to the same extent], and is a time when it is not propitious to establish a relationship with God. Old age is characterized as evil [miserable] days. We find out why as we read the next few verses.
- The oldest interpreters of this passage (vs. 2-7), whether the Targum or Reformed interpreters, have rightly recognized that Solomon is speaking metaphorically of old age. Although one cannot with microscopic precision interpret all of the metaphors perfectly in this passage, one can fence his interpretations according to similar passages and to the immediate context—old age and death. If this passage were taken literally, as some modern interpreters take it, one would get the sense of an approaching storm or economic depression. The next question to be asked then would be, what does the approaching storm mean. I reject the literal interpretation of this passage due to its seeming inappropriateness given the literary and subject matter context. Longman and Keil and Delitzsch are especially helpful in presenting the general sense of these terms when interpreted metaphorically.
- In verse 2, Qohelet says to remember God before the sun, light, moon, and stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain. One popular and old interpretation of this passage is that, since the luminary bodies are the governors of the day, the night, and the seasons (Gen. 1:15-19), they represent the eyes and the soul. Although plausible, Scripture seems to portray adversity, judgment, and destruction when referring to

decreation or the darkening of the luminaries (cf. Matt 24:29, et al). This being true, Solomon is saying remember God, young man, before the coming days of adversities. The context dictates that we interpret the coming adversities to old age.

- Although our hope is in Christ for the inheritance of glory, growing old and dying is still a result of the frustration to which God has subjected the creation due to sin and in the hope of glory. The clouds, which normally dump rain and then go away, here, are seen as dumping their rain and then returning quickly to dump more rain. Many interpreters see this as symbolic to the seeming truth that miserable events seem to come more often during old age (e.g., death of friends; sickness and disease; sorrow over family, church, and state due to knowing about deplorable situations.).
- Solomon says in verse 3 to remember God before the day that the keepers of the house tremble, the men of strength stoop, and the ones grinding cease because they are few, and the lookers through the windows grow dim. Both the Targum and orthodox interpreters of the past (e.g., Keil) have recognized that the trembling guards of the house are the hands. Generally speaking, due to nerve deterioration, the hands and appendages of the elderly do tend to shake. In addition, the man and woman begin to stoop due to calcium deficiencies and muscle deterioration due to years of stress and strain. The strength of youth is no longer present. The grinders of grain, or metaphorically, the molars (teeth) in the mouth are few. Due to poor health and/or poor dental care, teeth were typically few in number among the aged Near Easterners. Finally, the lookers through the windows, typically understood as the eyes, grow dim. After many years, and perhaps due to cataracts and other ailments or physical deterioration, eyesight among the elderly is not as sharp as during the time of youth.
- Qohelet speaks that the doors to the street are closed and the sound of the grinding fades. Since doors may represent the orifices of the body, historically interpreted as the ears, and since the sound of grinding fades, interpreters have concluded that Solomon is hear discussing the loss of hearing that is characteristic of older age.
- Solomon continues to describe the time of old age as a time when men rise early with the birds. It is commonly known that the older one becomes, the less sleep they require. Some scientists say that this is due to a melatonin deficiency in the pituitary gland under the brain. Also, old age is a time when typically the joy of singing ceases. Sorrows are whelming, and sobriety verses song is more characteristic of this time of life.
- Although wisdom and sobriety are appropriate during the time of old age (Eccl. 3), it should be noted that the elderly, who know and remember God, will fare better in their final days before entering glory than will the reprobate before they enter hell. The sound of joyful shouting and salvation are in the house of the righteous all of their days, even their latter days.
- Many interpreters of verse 5 agree that Qohelet continues to describe old age by calling it a time when men fear heights, or the outside world. Many of the elderly fear the works and ways of the contemporary world. It is faster, foreign, threatening, dangerous, uncertain. They feel isolated, dependent (although seeking to be independent of need), and fearful. This is why it is so important for the elderly to continue to read, learn, and participate in life until you die. Men should not be idle from age 55 onward. When your skills and capabilities stagnate, when you don't use your body parts, when you fail to venture out to labor some type of work, you fall

behind and find it even more difficult to participate in modern life. If life is full of terror and risks when one is young and involved, imagine the terror and risks in the mind of one who is older. This is why young men must seek to understand this perspective of the elderly so as to best minister to them in their older age.

- The caperberry blossoms, or almond blossoms of verse 5, when in full bloom, are very white like the hair of the aged man. The elderly man is glorious when arrayed with white hair as long as it is accompanied by wisdom, else he is a white-haired fool (Pr. 16:21).
- Bridges quotes Cotton regarding the caperberry, or almond tree. The tree is said to blossom in the spring and not in the winter, whereas the hoary hair of a man is his winter blossoming. The tree flourishes with its blossoms before its fruit, whereas a hoary headed man has already been fruitful in the earlier, vigorous days of his life. Cotton concludes that he that has a hoary head is flourishing in the spring of another world of immortality.
- Verse 5 continues by stating that during the time of whitened hair, one doesn't move along as quickly on foot as in the days of youth. The elderly man, as he grows older, drags himself along slowly like an old grasshopper which drags its big body with little, stick-like legs. Furthermore, Qohelet mentions that it is the normal course of Providence that older people have a diminishing of desire. This could certainly mean sexual desire, although this is not necessarily, or universally true. Some of the most lewd behavior can occur in nursing homes among elderly singles. Also, the elderly do indeed make up a portion of today's pornography market. Perhaps, the sense here is that desire for life tends to fade after nearly one century of life. Nonetheless, there is still a general diminishing of desire, including sexual desire, as one grows older.
- In verse 5, Qohelet makes a shift from the discussion of old age in general to a discussion of death itself as the final frustration of mankind under the sun. Man goes to his eternal home, which verse 7 clearly defines as God. Verse 1 and 7 respectively reveal that God created man (Gen. 1—from the dust of the earth) and that man finally returns to God who made him, their body resting and remaining in the grave. Job 34:15—and man would return to the dust. Man having died, the mourners go about the street mourning his passing.
- With regard to life under the sun, man's life ends in the grave. But what happens to their soul? WCF SC Q#37 asks, "What benefits do believers receive from Christ at their death?" The answer, "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection." While the earthly house is fading away, one must remember that there exists a house in heaven preserved for the righteous one.
- Verse 6 continues to detail the time period before which one should remember their Creator. Verse 6 contains two pairs of metaphors that further describe the death that is spoken of at the end of verse 5. First, a cord snaps that is holding a golden bowl. Longman interprets the bowl as holding candles that light the room. When the cord, which hangs from the ceiling, and which hold the lamp, snaps, then the bowl comes crashing to the floor and the lights, or candles, are snuffed out, or extinguished. Second, a water jar, which holds water (the sustenance of life) hangs in the well. The well wheel, which by a rope is connected to the water jar is broken. The water jar

falls and subsequently shatters. The jar can no longer hold the water. The broken jar, with water, and the broken bowl, without light, both represent the end of life which culminates the life of one having been born and having lived under the sun.

- Dying words: Machen: The active righteousness of Christ, no hope without it; Charles Wesley: In age and feebleness extreme, who shall a helpless worm redeem, Jesus, my only hope thou art, Strength of my failing flesh and heart, O let me catch a smile from thee, and drop into eternity.
- As Longman states, Qohelet provides an extreme picture of the mental and physical deterioration that comes with old age. He has taught that life under the sun is the greatest frustration. He has taught that there are many things that are better than other things under the sun, for example, being wise is better than being a fool in life. He has warned us to remember God early in life before the days of misery come and one's life is frustrated by death.

### **C. Man's fear of and obedience to God is what he can know to do to resolve the frustration regarding God's Sovereignty and his own mortality 12:8-14**

**Verse 8 Frustration of frustrations, says Qohelet, everything is frustrating. Verse 9 And not only was Qohelet wise, he also imparted knowledge to the people, he pondered, investigated, and set in order many proverbs. Verse 10 Qohelet searched to find delightful words, ones being written [both] upright and true. Verse 11 Words of wise men are as goads, and, like embedded nails are [the] collections of masters, [which are] given by one Shepherd. Verse 12 And an addition to [these wise words], my son, be admonished, of the making of many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the body. Verse 13 [Here is the] end of [this] matter, everything having been heard, fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's everything. Verse 14 For every deed, God will bring into judgment, including everything being concealed, whether good or whether evil.**

- Qohelet began Eccl., like a Middle Eastern biographer, with a third person singular introduction (Eccl. 1:1-11). He now completes the frame to his writing by reverting back, with regard to perspective, to a third person-perspective writing style (i.e., "says Qohelet). Many do not see Solomon as the framer or the writer. Many, with which I agree, see Solomon as both. Solomon, the philosopher king now concludes his wisdom literature by revealing the ultimate occupation of man—fearing God and keeping His commandments.
- Qohelet has taught his young disciple in Eccl. 1:13 that he sought ultimate meaning in a transient environment of meaninglessness. After his life-long search, he concludes here as he did in Eccl. 1:2: Frustration of frustration, everything is frustrating. He found that life under the sun is the ultimate frustration in that every created thing is as vapor; doesn't fulfill its intended purpose; encounters Providence and seeming contradictions to the normal course of Providence; can't know all things in order to eliminate risks of danger, failure, and death; and then inevitably dies. He begins this final section with a recapitulation of his premise: all is frustrating.
- In the midst of this frustration, however, some things are better than others. Wisdom, for example, must be applied to mitigate risks and to enjoy life in the midst of



frustration. Solomon has counseled that nothing is better than that one should be eating, drinking, and enjoying the good in one's labors, for this is one's gift from God. Even the power (consciously) to enjoy the good in one's life is a gift from God. He adds that one should enjoy the wife of one's youth and labor diligently with all your capabilities to the glory of God, for one can do none of these things in the grave where one will go. Qohelet emphasizes most that wisdom is better than folly. He, therefore, writes and teaches many proverbs as a wise man would.

- Qohelet, the assembler of the people, not only pondered that which was perplexing to the mind, and he not only attempted to resolve them, but he also imparted his knowledge to the people that they may learn to fear God and live wisely in this life. Qohelet sought to find gracious words, wise words by which he would impart his sayings. He was not a hypocrite. Eccl. is a testimony that Solomon sought to teach according to the same standards that he taught. He sought to ensure that his ponderings were well analyzed and subsequently resolved with precision—righteous and truthful precision. God inspired Solomon's words to that end that Christian men may know how to please God.
- In verse 11, Qohelet explains that all wise men seek to do what he has done, although one must acknowledge that Solomon's effort was accomplished in righteousness and in truth. The words of the wise are considered as goads. Solomon considers the collections of the wise men as well-driven nails. Hendrikson mentions that Martin J. Wyngaarden calls the goads, the problems that are an incentive for investigation, and the embedded nails, the solutions to those problems. I believe Wyngaarden is correct. He adds that the wise words of the wise men are collected, however, true wisdom comes from God above, the one Shepherd, and wisdom manifest, Christ, as personified in Pr. 1 and 2. James clearly presents this truth of wisdom coming from the one Shepherd above (James 3:13-18). Wisdom is synonymous with righteousness. The fear of God is the beginning of true wisdom. James expresses these differences between heavenly wisdom and demonic folly and sin.
- Qohelet seems to teach his young son that all who seek ultimate meaning write books, many books. Solomon adds that of the writing of many books there is no end. Generations of wise men write the same things. Studying all of the writings all of the time fatigues the body.
- On the other hand, it should be noted that God's revelation, as recorded by Holy men of old, stands as ultimate wisdom in a transient world. Ps. 1 teaches that one should meditate on God's Words day and night. God speaks that His Word as recorded in the Bible is a lamp unto the feet of mankind and a light unto his path. God's Words are the standard, the righteousness, and the wisdom of God. God's Words speak of Christ. God's Word is Christ—the eternal Word of the Father (Rev. 19:13).
- Qohelet, who said that life under the sun is frustrating, that man must toil and find joy in it until he dies, and that wisdom is better than folly, concludes his discourse by saying that the ultimate work of man is to fear God and to keep His commands throughout one's life. This is the ultimate work and the ultimate good. Longman rightly notes the two motive clauses that answer the question, "why should one fear God and keep His commandments?" The answers: 1) this is man's all, and 2) man will be judged by his deeds.

- First, fearing God and keeping His commands is man's everything, his greatest good. So, what is the end of all things? What is the ultimate good? What is that which has an end and remains? As the Jerusalemites asked Peter, "What shall we do?" Qohelet declares that the final word, meant to direct mankind to ultimate meaning and true knowledge and wisdom, is to fear God and to keep His commandments, because this occupation is man's everything, it is his all, it is his ultimate work and duty. God has recorded His commandments in His Word: the Law and the Prophets. God has summarized them all in the ten commandments (Ex. 20; Deut. 5). Christ, the living Son of God has summarized them into love God and love your neighbor as yourself. We see that God's all for mankind is to love Him and one's neighbor according to His Holy Law Word. Without God's Law there can be no true love, or wisdom for that matter.
- In verse 13, God, our King, our Lawgiver, and our Judge reveals our framework for action in life (fearing Him and keeping His commands) in order to present us with the ultimate message—the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6-7)—to fear God and to give Him glory. How do we do that? By keeping His commands. By embracing the One whom He sent, Jesus Christ, as our salvation. Believing in Christ to come was the first gospel message to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15). This message brought hope to futility. The creation, which was subjected to futility, now had a hope, a hope of glory, Christ Jesus, the Son of God. The redemption of Christ was hoped for by the Old Testament saints. Christ, the Hope of redemption and glory, has come for us and for them and has saved us all, all of His elect, from the futility of meaninglessness through His shed blood on the cross of Calvary.
- The second reason for fearing God and for keeping His commands is that God will hold man accountable for his thoughts, words, and deeds accomplished in the flesh. Qohelet exhorts his young disciple to fear God and keep His commands under the sun for when his disciple dies, he must stand before a holy God and give an account for all of his occupations (e.g., father, elder, laborer, husband, etc) accomplished while alive in the frustration under the sun. This is now a well-known truth to the disciple for Solomon has brought forth this ultimate fact of ethical accountability throughout Eccl. (Eccl. 3:17; 8:12-13; 11:9; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). Although God will judge one's works in this life, there will be an ultimate reckoning, or judgement, after death, for it is appointed for man once to die, and then the judgment (Heb. 9:27).
- Qohelet never teaches that frustration will be eliminated in life if one were to embrace Christ and obey His commands. He teaches God's covenant people that life under the sun is frustrating and will continue to be so, but Christ, the righteousness of God and the wisdom of God has saved us from the ultimate meaninglessness of eternal condemnation. God's redemptive work in Christ is the ultimate work, of the ultimate One, through His ultimate Son, so that His elect, who were lost in sin, and subject to futility, might have an ultimate hope of entering an ultimate kingdom. All of this hope and glory is predicated on our fearing God and keeping His commands, the ultimate occupation of man, and the ultimate joy of the elect of mankind. This ultimate teaching brings profit. It brings advantage in that it eternally saves and blesses the one who embraces this teaching and does it.
- These are the conclusions of Qohelet. This is the resolve of vanity under the sun. Fear God and keep His commands early in life and throughout life. The Holy Spirit

applies redemption to us, and the Holy Spirit continues to sanctify us. The Holy Spirit is God the Enabler of His revelation. If God be for us, who can be against us?

- This concludes the writings of Qohelet who has taught us the reality of life, who has taught us the resolve of the frustration called life, and who has taught us how to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's mortality. With this knowledge, may you now find joy and wisdom in the rest of your days under the sun. May your time under the sun prepare you for eternal glory with Christ, His Father, and the saints of the Most High.