

# **SOLOMON’S RECANTATION AND REPENTANCE: or, The Book of Ecclesiastes Briefly and Fully Explained**

## **NOTE ON THE TEXT OF THIS EDITION**

### **Revisions of Original**

The style and structure of the originally printed commentary by William Pemble presents great difficulties for the modern reader. First, there is the difficulty of lettering of various words. In a few notable instances, words were spelled using different letters than are used at this time. For example, the letter “f” often substitutes for the letter “s”. Thus, the words “Jesus Christ” are printed as “Jefus Chrif”. The lettering of such words has been modernized throughout this edition.

Second, some words are simply spelled differently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For example the word “containing” was spelled “containing”. Spelling of words have been modernized throughout.

Third, the letters “th” are used at the end of verbs in places where we now use “s”. Such usage has also been modernized. Therefore, instead of reading “saith” you will find “says” in this edition.

Fourth, the physical printing of the book reflected the Ramist logic, which was much used by Puritan theologians. One aspect of Ramist logic is the division of things into their various parts and subparts. Thus, Pemble breaks down the entire book of Ecclesiastes into two main parts: 1:2-6:12 and 7:1-12:14. Each of these halves are then divided into parts, and the smaller divisions are again subdivided.

Such a division of material into various parts and subparts is quite useful for one making a detailed analysis of a text. You will find evidence of this division of the book throughout the following commentary.

What you will not find is the original physical layout of the page as made by Pemble and his first printers. On any given page, you may find a page that looks like an outline. In basic form it would look thus:

- I. Proposition:
  - A. Point “A”
    - 1. Sub-point 1
    - 2. Sub-point
    - 3. Sub-point
      - a. sub-sub-point
      - b. sub-sub-point
  - B.
  - C. Etc.

We have reproduced a few pages of the original text in facsimile in the appendix at the end of this work so that you can see the appearance of the original.

While we have attempted to maintain the logic of Pemble’s outline, we have removed the bald outline format and have replaced it with chapter breaks, page breaks, titles, subtitles and the

like.

Fifth, certain words in the text will have either changed meaning over the past hundreds of years or will no longer be commonly known by a modern reader. In most instances, we have added a modern equivalent immediately following the archaic word or meaning. In a few instances it was deemed necessary to provide a footnote to fully explain the word or usage.

### **Footnotes**

Pemble's original commentary contained various margin notes. We have reproduced most of those margin notes as footnotes within this text. These footnotes will be unmarked.

In addition, certain footnotes have been supplied by the editor. Where footnotes have been supplied by the editor, you will find an italicized "*Ed.*" at the end of the note.

### **Latin and Hebrew:**

Latin was a much more commonly known language in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly among those with a college education. In many places, Pemble adds Latin quotations or phrases to help explain himself. Since such phrases would be of limited use to modern readers, the Latin explanations have either been removed or translated into English.

Pemble was a noted Hebrew scholar. Thus would often add the Hebrew word into his explanation, apparently on the assumption that the Hebrew reference would help the learned reader follow along with his argument.

Again, most people are unfamiliar with Hebrew and thus the insertion of Hebrew words into the text would be distracting or off-putting. Therefore, the Hebrew references have been removed in most instances. In those places where it was necessary to retain the Hebrew reference to understand Pemble's argument, the Hebrew has been transliterated.

### **Layout of Commentary:**

At the beginning of each section, there will be an introduction supplied by the editor. Thereafter you will find the text of Ecclesiastes for easy reference. The text used is the Authorized Version (King James Version), since that was the text in use by Pemble and since the commentary proper quotes from that version.

Following the text there will be a section entitled "Commentary". The "Commentary" is Pemble's commentary on the text at hand.

### **Base Text:**

The base text used for this edition was the Fourth Edition of the Collected Works of William Pemble, published in 1659. Where there were apparent difficulties in the text, earlier editions of Pemble's work were consulted for clarification.

## **INTRODUCTION TO COMMENTARY:**

Pemble breaks the argument of Ecclesiastes into two sections: 1:2-6:12 and 7:1-12:14. This broad outline is followed by most commentators on the book. Pemble sees the book of consisting of basic propositions<sup>1</sup>: First a “negative” proposition: This is where happiness is not found. Second, a “positive” proposition: This is where happiness may be found.

Pemble also finds an underlying structure in the book which runs across chapter boundaries. This reading differs from most contemporary commentators on the book, which seem to find Ecclesiastes covering series of individual topics without necessary logical connections. Thus, the divisions below will follow the arrangement of topics, not the chapter structures.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare the comment of Puritan Edward Reynolds, “The scope of the wise man is, to direct us in the right way to true happiness. And this he doth, negatively, assuring us that it is not to be found in any thing under the sun. Secondly, affirmatively, that it is to be found only in God and his service.” 4 Reynolds 41.

## Inscription: Describing the author of the book: Chapter 1:1

The first subject addressed by Pemble concerns the inscription or introduction to the entire work. This verse identifies the writer of the book and his purpose. Pemble finds the unnamed writer to be Solomon, the son of David.

The identification of the writer of the book is crucial to an understanding of the entire work. Since the work is written by Solomon, the work must have been written toward the end of Solomon's life, which makes the work a recantation and an act of repentance by Solomon.

This perspective runs visibly throughout the commentary as a whole. Since the work is a work of repentance by a wise man, Pemble reads as an ongoing dialogue between competing points of view. Seeming unorthodox statements are read as those ideas once entertained by Solomon but rejected.

Another interesting aspect of Pemble's commentary is that he takes seriously the fact that Solomon was King. Pemble living in a country and at a time where Kingship was a serious matter, did not discount the question of a king's perspective. This is an aspect of interpretation which is routinely ignored by contemporary commentators.

### Text:

*Ecclesiastes 1:1: The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*

### Commentary:

Inscription, verse one, describing the author of the book:

First, by the person he now takes on him, Coheleth<sup>2</sup>, a preacher, or reconciled penitent, or both, this being a penitential sermon, or writing, delivered to the church or assembly of faithful Jews.

Second, by his parentage, son of David.

Third, by his dignity and office, a king, amplified by the place, in Jerusalem.

Doctrine<sup>3</sup>: Inquiring where man's chief good and blessedness consists. Negatively<sup>4</sup>: Disabusing the virtue of such things as might seem to make us happy. This is done generally in one main proposition:

*That there is nothing within the compass and power of created nature that can make man happy.*

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<sup>2</sup> Pemble's preferred transliteration of the Hebrew word.

<sup>3</sup> Like a good Puritan sermon, Pemble provides a succinct statement of what he intends to teach. *Ed.*

<sup>4</sup> Affirmatively [for an affirmative statement of the book's doctrines] see chapter 7.

## Four General Proofs of the Proposition that Nothing in Creation Can Make Man Happy: Chapter 1:2-11:

In the Preamble to the work as a whole, Solomon makes the point that the creation alone is unable to make the creature (human beings) happy. This done by means of four general statements: (1) Human Conduct is “fruitless”. (2) Everything in creation changes. (3) All things are frail (“weak”), that is they wear out; nothing lasts forever. (4) Human beings can never provide the help to themselves which they ultimately need.

### Text:

*Ecclesiastes 1:2-11: 2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. 3 What profit has a man of all his labour which he takes under the sun? 4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides for ever. 5 The sun also arises, and the sun goes down, and hastes to his place where he arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, and turns about unto the north; it whirls about continually, and the wind returns again according to his circuits. 7 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. 8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 The thing that has been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. 10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it has been already of old time, which was before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.*

### Commentary:

This negative proposition is delivered in verse 2: concluding all under vanity, and that most vain vanity, weakness, inconstancy, fruitlessness, et cetera. That phrase is repeated to make it seem the more vain. This negative proposition is confirmed by four general reasons:

#### ***First, The Fruitlessness of Human Conduct:***

From the fruitlessness of all human actions, endeavors, counsels, and projects wherein he busies himself under the Sun; i.e., in matters of this world, whose uttermost extent is confined within the possibilities of the creature, and the circuit of this life. All the happiness that a man may propose or procure to himself by those means, if it be resolved into its sinful issue and conclusion, ends in nothing and leaves a man no profit [Hebrew: *yitron*, i.e., residue] or remaining fruit to abide with him. When all that account is subducted there rests nothing but ciphers<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> When the profitless action of this world is subtracted from one's life, the only thing left is a zero. *Ed.*

From the mutability and changeable condition of man himself. Eternity is an inseparable accident of perfect felicity<sup>6</sup>: nor can those things make us truly happy, which cannot establish us in the perpetual enjoyment of our bliss. And thus are the things of our world, whose greatest strength cannot alter the frail and perishing estate of man.

***Second, from the Changeableness of Humanity and the Natural World:***

Generations come and generations pass away: Both fathers and children are at last thrust out of possession of the earth's felicity. In which only complement of true felicity, man is so far from being happy as his condition is worse than that of other creatures, yea of those that seem most inconstant. Instances [*examples*] are four:

*First example:* The Earth abiding forever, seeing the rise and fall of all ages, the state of all actions, the womb that gives and receives all, viler<sup>7</sup> than the worse man for its nature, better than the most happy for continuance in that being it has<sup>8</sup>.

*Second example:* The Sun, verse 5, which a champion, runs his course from one end of heaven to the other<sup>9</sup>; and with an even and unaltered motion observes the time of rising and setting in the evening, as it arises with equal glory and brightness in the morning (not so man).

*Third example:* The winds, verse 6, which seem most unsteady and changeable in their motion, yet so pass over the quarters and coasts of the world as they observe their circuits wherein they run their compass yearly, monthly, and daily (in some places), as God ordains, who brings them out of his treasures<sup>10</sup>.

*Fourth example:* The waters, a shuttle [rapidly moving] and running substance, yet more durable and lasting than man and his felicity. The sea still holding the same quantity since the Creation for depth and wideness, not withstanding the infinite access of all rivers emptying

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<sup>6</sup> The word “accident” here does not mean a “mistake”. It refers to the Aristotelean difference between “accident” and “substance”. An “accident” is that aspect of a thing which can be changed without affecting the “substance”. For example, Socrates has the substance of “man”. Socrates could change various “accidents”, that is, grow his hair long or lose weight, and still be a “man”.

Felicity means “happiness”.

By “eternity is an inseparable accident of perfect felicity”, Pemble means that happiness cannot truly exist unless it is inseparably tied to eternity. We cannot be truly happy with things which must end. True happiness must be unending happiness. *Ed.*

<sup>7</sup> “Viler” here does not refer to moral virtue; it is a reference to its relative worth. The physical dirt beneath a human (and all of the material earth) is worth less than a human being, thus the earth is “viler” than a man. *Ed.*

<sup>8</sup> The earth is better able to resist change than the best or happiest human being. *Ed.*

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 19:4-7. *Ed.*

<sup>10</sup> Job 14:7.

themselves into it: And as the sea is never full, so are rivers never empty, the waters still flowing, but still renewed by the supply from the clouds and their fountains. Verse 7.

***Third, From the Weakness of All Things:***

From the weakness and insufficiency of those things which should procure our happiness: It is essential to true happiness to give perpetual contentment without all weariness and loathsomeness, but so cannot the things of the world, all of which are full of labor (or weariness) both in getting and enjoying; and that so great as it is unutterable. Instance for all, those contents<sup>11</sup> which we receive by seeing and hearing, both which may cloy a man and weary him out, but never satisfy him. The eye may behold delightful objects till it aches, and the string crack, and it be ready to fall out with gazing, and yet a man's desire of seeing is not satisfied. The ear may hear the most sweet and melodious music, and would always hear it, did not weariness, sleep and toil compel us to break off when we are unsatisfied as at the beginning<sup>12</sup>. Of these pleasures a man may break his neck before his fast. Nor is it so much the want [ed., lack] of variety that breeds weariness and loathing in these worldly things as the inward weakness of the things themselves: In Heaven, the objects of our delight and blessedness shall be thought uniform yet everlastingly pleasing.

***Fourth, the Impossibility of Man Helping Himself:***

From the perpetual impossibility in man ever to help himself unto a better condition, in regard of worldly felicity: For, whereas all men have sought happiness, no man [has] ever yet found it, it may be said, it was through their weakness and ignorance, but that now in these later and wiser times, men may devise new courses, lay new plots and ground works whereon to build true happiness. This conceit [ed., idea] Solomon takes away, verses 9-11 affirming that there is nothing new under the Sun. What has been, now is; and what is, shall be; both things and actions have been always the same in substance. Former ages have gone as far in this search of happiness as the latter could do; nor shall generations coming find more than other have found before. Which point, Solomon puts to the judgment of men themselves, to name the particular which may seem new, verse 10, and constant affirms that it has been in old times, but only that is seems new to us – length of time and shortness of life having put out the remembrance of the former, as it will do also of the later, verse 11.

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<sup>11</sup> Moments of contentment. *Ed.*

<sup>12</sup> Here Pemble quotes Manilius, a Latin poet during the reign of Augustus, “Labor est etiam ipsa voluptas”: Labor is often its own reward. *Ed.*

## **SPECIFIC PROOFS THAT MAN'S TRUE HAPPINESS DOES NOT CONSIST IN ANYTHING IN THE CREATED ORDER: CHAPTER 1:12 - 6:12**

In this section of the book, Solomon details the means by which the creation is unable to ever fully satisfy the creature. In Ecclesiastes 1:12-18, Solomon provides an introduction to his investigation where he explains the motives for his search and the results of his search.

Following the introduction, gives the particulars of his search. Pemble gives the following summary to information covered in Ecclesiastes 2:1-6:12:

*Specifically in certain particulars, Solomon reckons up and prove that felicity does not consist therein, though usually men think so; and these are four: 1. Knowledge of all things. 2. Pleasures, or the delightful use of things. 3. Honors, power and great places in the world. 4. Riches and possessions; all which are prosecuted [ed., pursued] with much variety, from the twelfth verse of this first chapter to the end of the sixth chapter. The two first Solomon propounds in his own experience, the others by observation of the course of the world. Concerning the former, observe.*

## PROLOGUE: VANITY SHOWN IN THE PARTICULAR INSTANCE OF THE VANITY OF ALL THINGS: ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18

Verses 12-18 provide an introduction to Solomon's search. In verses 12-13, Solomon provides three motivations for his search: (1) Solomon's own position as king. (2) The desire and bent of Solomon's mind and heart. (3) The command of God. In verses 14-18, Solomon provides the results of his search.

### Text:

*Ecclesiastes 1:12-18: 12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. 16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. 17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. 18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.*

### Commentary:

Proposal and censure [*evaluation*] of those courses [*actions*]:

#### ***The Three Motivations for Solomon's Search (verses 12-13):***

Of knowledge in the inquisition whereof Solomon describes unto us the motives that led him to this most noble and excellent search, which were three:

*First*, his kingly dignity, verse 12, knowledge become none better than a king; none have such means to get it as kings: especially such as a king of Israel in Jerusalem.

*Second*, the bent and desire of his own heart after knowledge, which being extraordinarily furnished with wisdom and a large apprehension, could not be idle, but did seek; and (which is more) search by the help of this wisdom to know all things within the compass of nature and morality, verse 13.

*Third*, the command of God, who hath laid this sore [painful, difficult, extreme, ed.] task upon the sons of men more or less, according to their degrees [of ability], to exercise themselves in this search after knowledge, to prevent pride and idleness, verse 13.

These three as they were motives, so they are arguments of praise, commending the exactness of Solomon's search and censure, that this was: 1. Not the labor of some silly wit

[*thoughtless or careless person*] but of the wisest king. 2. Not an overly wandering inquiry, but an attent[ive] search, closely upon the rules of reason. 3. Nor undertaken upon needless curiosity, but every man's necessary duty.

***The Two-Fold Result of Solomon's Investigation (verses 14-18):***

The effect and issue of this disquisition, which is double, according as knowledge is two-fold:

***First, of nature in the causes, effects, properties of all created substances:***

All which works, Solomon professes himself to have seen and known as far as any might go, verse 14. Now of this natural philosophy, we have:

*The censure* in a few words, yet well to be observed, that all this is but vanity in regard of procuring true happiness to us (otherwise it is an excellent and no vain knowledge) and so far is it from giving true content[ment], as it breeds more vexation of the mind, or feeds it but with wine for solid food, verse 14.

*The reason of this censure*, verse 15: First, from its weakness, to correct and amend the causes of our infelicity, or the crookedness and perverseness of our nature, or errors of our knowledge being impossible for the wisest of mortal men to obtain so exact knowledge in these things, as to set straight the wryed [twisted; cf. awry, ed.] and distorted image of God in us, so far as concerns knowledge in its lowest degree (much less sanctification) and to free us from errors in apprehending the nature of things, wherewith even Solomon, though less than others, was also troubled. Secondly, from its imperfections and defects, there being many thousand particulars in Nature still unknown to them that know most of it. Herein is vexation of this knowledge, the former is the vanity of it.

*A confirmation of the truth and justice of this censure*, by a prolepsis<sup>13</sup>: You may be deceived, your knowledge haply [perhaps, ed.] is weak, slight, and ordinary, and this judgment is ill grounded, et cetera. Solomon answers, Nay they are best able to judge things that best know them. But upon due examination of his own heart, and all the excellent endowments thereof, he finds, that as he had all royal dignities, riches and greatness of outward state, so he had gotten more wisdom than the greatest that went before him in his kingdom as he had magnified and preferred wisdom in his choice above other things, 1 Kings, so he had increased therein more than any: Further, that this knowledge was not groundless, superficial, woven out of roving and uncertain imaginations and weak conclusions, but was experimental (his heart had seen), his understanding and judgment took exact observation of what his eye had seen in all particulars in nature, brought unto his view from far and near, verse 16.

***Second, of the morality, verse 17:***

He gave his mind to understand the whole course of practical affairs and actions of men, wherein men do carry them wisely, justly, and virtuously, wherein foolishly and wickedly. In

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<sup>13</sup> A "prolepsis" is an answer given to an objection before the objection is actually raised. Pemble finds this to be a common form of rhetoric used by Solomon throughout Ecclesiastes.

brief, he sought out to know the whole mystery of virtue and vice, terming that wisdom, this madness and folly. An excellent inquiry and well befitting a king, whom it concerns to know what belong to himself and subjects in matters ethic, politic and economic. Of this knowledge we have likewise the:

*Censure*, that it is vexation of spirit, viz, to see the endless folly and wretchedness of man's nature, and what good everyone ought to do, and yet how little any one is either willing or able to practice it, verse 17.

*A proof of this sentence particularly annexed to this kind of knowledge*, but applicable to both; it is drawn from the ill concomitant or companion of this knowledge, i.e., continual discontent and grief of mind: for if we respect first, the labor and affliction of the body and mind in searching after it. Secondly, the intricate doubts, questions, opinions, errors which must be scanned with much trouble and little profit. Thirdly, the new discovery of our invincible ignorance<sup>14</sup> in a world of matters even when we know most. Fourthly, the envy, neglect and disrespect that a more excellent measure of knowledge than common draws upon us. Fifthly, the insufficiency of it to perfect that which is amiss in our selves or others. Sixthly, the perishing nature of it, that neither it nor us by it is immortal but decays by our age and dies and is forgotten in our graves: if we respect these and the like, it cannot but vex us to the heart to see so desirable a quality to be so little beneficial to us, verse 18.

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<sup>14</sup> “Invincible ignorance” is an idea from SOURCE that some kinds of ignorance are so great that no amount of information or persuasion can overcome the ignorance and cause the other to change his mind.

## **FOUR COURSES OF INVESTIGATION TO PROVE THE INABILITY OF ANYTHING IN CREATION TO MAKE MEN HAPPY: PLEASURE, PROVIDENCE, GREATNESS (WORLDLY AUTHORITY) & RICHES**

Solomon systematically works through four courses, or methods, by which men may seek to obtain happiness or contentment in this world. First, he examines pleasures and delights. He shows that pleasures in and of themselves are incapable of providing happiness. However, when viewed in relationship to God and as a gift of God, certainly worldly things may be a source of happiness. Second, he investigates God's providence as a basis upon which one may find contentment in this world. Note again, that the contentment is not based upon the use of the created order as an end in itself, but rather as seen in relation to God. Third, he investigates the uses and abuse of "greatness", worldly power as an inadequate source for happiness. Finally, he investigates riches as an inadequate source for happiness.

## FIRST COURSES OF INVESTIGATION TO PROVE THE INABILITY OF ANYTHING IN CREATION TO MAKE MEN HAPPY: PLEASURES AND DELIGHTS: 2:1-26

(Introduction to section by Pemble) From the studies of learning and knowledge, Solomon falls (from the better to worse) to make trial [make an examination] of another course for obtaining of happiness, and that is by pleasures and delights in the use of all things tending to the cheering up of the body and mind. Seeing the knowledge of the creatures could do him no good, he would try what delight the use of them could bring unto him.

### TWO WAYS OF PLEASURE PROPOSED AND CENSURED (2:1-11):

In this section of the book, Solomon details the sort of pleasures he obtained during his investigation into the world. Solomon provides both a general overview of the results of his excursion into pleasure and also provides a detailed list of the sort of pleasures he experienced.

#### Text:

*Ecclesiastes 2:1-11: 1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. 2 I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What does it? 3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. 4 I made me great works; I built me houses; I planted me vineyards: 5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: 6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that brings forth trees: 7 I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: 8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. 10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. 11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*

#### Commentary:

##### *The Types of Pleasures Pursued*

Now whereas there are two kinds of pleasure: First, some more brutish, sensual, and

Epicurean, letting loose the reins of all voluptuous desires, without all regard of reason, religion or honesty.

Second, some more manly and tolerable guided and bounded within the rules of reason and common honesty: We cannot think that so wise and good a man as Solomon would like an (Apicius<sup>15</sup> or Sardanapalu<sup>16</sup>) seek for the felicity of a reasonable man in brutish and unreasonable pleasures, and at the first fall from all religion and civility to such folly and impiety. True it is, that these pleasurable courses did draw him too far to forget both God and himself; but it appears by the sequel of this chapter, that Solomon purposed with himself to keep the middle way [*way of moderation*] so to give himself unto his delight, as withal to retain his wisdom, by the power whereof he might exactly discern how far a man might go in the use of them, and what was the utmost extent of goodness that could be found in them. And this certainly was the only way to take a true survey of pleasure, so to use them as still to keep his wisdom and judgment sound and not besotted.

***The Result of Solomon's Investigation of Pleasure:***

Now in the pursuit of these more worthy manlike pleasures, declared in the former part of this chapter, we have to observe:

***First, general sum of Solomon's deliberation, practice and censure touching this matter of pleasure:***

*His course purposed and resolved on by himself: I said in my heart, i.e., decreed in his mind to try what pleasure would do, seeing knowledge gave him no better content, verse 1.*

*His censure of this course: At large [in general], it is vanity, all pleasures perishing with their use, verse 1. More specially, of an eminent degree of pleasure or laughter & its root or cause, merriment, whether outward of the company, or inward in the free and frolic temper of the heart: of these Solomon's judgment is that they are unreasonable and madmen that delight in them and that they know not what they do, if they think contentment stands therein; a severe censure of laughter and profuse jollity, arguing levity, foolishness, sinfulness in the subject or object of it, or both, verse 2.*

***Second, a particular declaration of Solomon's experience in the course of pleasures,***

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<sup>15</sup> “A glutton who lived during the time of Augustus and Tiberius. . . . He poisoned himself for fear of starving, though at the time he was worth £75,000” (Oskar Seyffert *Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art*, repr. \_\_\_\_ (New York: Gramercy Books, 1995), 40-41).

<sup>16</sup> According to Diodorus Siculus, he was “the last king of the Assyrians, exceeded in all his predecessors in sloth and luxury; for besides that he was seen of none out of his family, he led a most effeminate life” (Diodorus, *The Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian: In Fifteen books; to which are added the fragments of Diodorus*, Vol. 1, trans. G. Booth, Esq. (London: J. Davis, 1814), 119.).

wherein he sets out to us:

*His intent, he sought in his heart to lay hold on folly, devised in himself to find the best and speediest means to get himself all contenting pleasures, which course from the event he calls folly. This is amplified by the manner of it ( yet leading or acquainting my heart with wisdom) to use pleasure with discretion, to use them and discern their vanity, to keep himself still master of his heart, and not to make it a slave to his delights, to keep him within compass of piety and honesty. And, the end of it, to see whether felicity did lie in these or no, verse 3.*

*His practice and execution of his purpose, set forth in two ways: the provision of materials in which to delight, and a statement of the value of the materials he used.*

*First, his provision of all materials whereout to work his delights; described in the parts and severals of Solomon's royal magnificence, his provision for the effecting of his contentment agreeing to the greatness of his estate and mind these particulars are,*

1. Sumptuous and delicate diet, verse 3, under the name of wine, comprising all manner of costly fare, curious and long banquettings, under this also we may comprehend [*understand*] gorgeous apparel and all provisions of the body.
2. Stately edificies and palaces, *verse 4.*
3. Vineyards, gardens, orchards very paradises for curious variety, & excellency of all sorts of trees, *verse 5.*
4. Fish ponds and cisterns of water to water his gardens and orchards, that for bigness were more like a wood than a private enclosure, *verse 6.*
5. Multitude of attendants, servants of both sexes, taken up aboard and bred up his house, *verse 7.*
6. Numbersome herds of cattle, the possession whereof were, as for supply of necessary uses, so not a little for delight, especially such as are brought from foreign parts, whereof Solomon had, no doubt, great store, *verse 7.*
7. Treasures of gold and silver, precious stones, and rarities wherewith all princes and provinces presented him withal, *verse 8.*
8. Music of all sorts: vocal of men and women; instrumental. Both illustrated by an epithete, the delights of the sons of men, unless [the Hebrew word] shall be taken for beautiful captive women, whom Solomon made his concubines<sup>17</sup>, and calls them the delights of the men, *verse 8.* Of these and particulars more, see 1 Kings 4 & 10; 2 Chron. 9.

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<sup>17</sup> All modern commentators translate the phrase in question as “concubines” or something similar.

*In the greatness and excellency of this his provision, illustrated*

1. By comparison with former kings, whom in pomp and magnificent state he far exceeded, verse 9.
2. By the greatness of his wisdom, which in the whole business stood *with* him, enabling him to invent the most curious [*interesting, complex*] and requisite and yet most lawful pleasures, verse 9.
3. By the largeness of his desires, to which he studied to give full content sparing no cost nor labor to procure all delights that he might be had, verse 10.

*In his contentment and joy that he took in those works of his* (his heart rejoiced in all his labor) this was the top and complement of his delights, that nothing hindered him (war, sickness, sorrow or mind) from a free and cheerful use of all this greatness; and this he enjoyed as the only portion and benefit of his labor. No man could do more, but many take the like pains, but reap not this content, verse 10.

*In his opinion and judgment concerning this course of pleasures.* This he delivers upon an advised and impartial survey of all his glorious and magnificent contentments which with great labor and contention of mind he had effected, whereupon he finds that all is vanity, changeable, fleeting, perishing, & c., and vexation of spirit, wearisome in getting and enjoying: in brief without all true benefit to true felicity, verse 11. And all this of lawful pleasure.

## **SOLOMON'S PARTICULAR ANALYSIS OF THE PLEASURES HE OBTAINED (2:11-26):**

In this section, Solomon considers what good is to be had in created things. He notes that although the world can easily turn to an “evil” when misused, it is not so in and of itself. “The world is not mere rack and engine to torment men’s minds and bodies; some comfort is to be found in the use of earthly things”. What is that good? Freely receiving and using the world as a gift from God.

### **Text:**

*12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that comes after the king? even that which has been already done. 13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness. 14 The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walks in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happens to them all. 15 Then said I in my heart, As it happens to the fool, so it happens even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. 16 For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dies the wise man? As the fool.*

*17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. 19 And who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. 20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that has not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what has man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart takes not rest in the night. This is also vanity. 24 There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? 26 For God gives to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he gives travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

### **Commentary:**

Thus we have two ways to happiness proposed and censured: Now follows a review of

them both, wherein Solomon discovers unto us some further particulars concerning each of them, as:

***Touching the knowledge of things: wherein we have:***

*First, Solomon advised consideration and second thoughts upon that course, I turned myself* (a note of heedfulness); *to behold Wisdom*, natural knowledge and moral prudence; *and madness and folly* i.e., ignorance and error, viciousness and silliness in moral behavior. The exactness of this review, Solomon confirms by way of prevention [*going before*, not hinderance]: That none can do more than himself hath done in the point and they that come after the king, a king, and such a king will fall short of him in this inquiry. Ergo, Solomon, the wisest man that ever has or shall live upon the earth, except Adam in his innocency, and Christ, which doth authorize his censure beyond exception; verse 12.

*Second, his judgment and determination: Solomon's first judgment is as to the benefit and excellency of this knowledge.* This he set down by comparison with and dispraise of its opposite: wisdom exceeds folly, verse 13. He shows this in a similitude, *as far as light is better than darkness*, verse 13.

Reason, from the effect of both, *the wise man's eyes are in his head*; as a watchtower to discover round about him and afar off, i.e., he is wary, judicious, heedful and advised in his courses, and so walks in the light; as a man that carries a candle before him. But *a fool walks in darkness*<sup>18</sup>, his eyes be out, or in his heels; he is ignorant, rash, heady, confident, inobservant of circumstances, of conveniences or mischiefs; stumbles on, not knowledge which way to choose or refuse; like a man that goes without a lantern, or carries at his back, verse 14.

Of the vanity and weakness of it, from the common event that befalls both the wise and the foolish<sup>19</sup>; from which no man's wisdom can exempt himself, not the wisest – *even to me* – the wisest of men, the same lot befalls that to others: and therefore there is in this respect no cause why a man should study to be more learned than another, which is also a great vanity, verses 14 & 15.

This agreement between wisdom and folly is confirmed by the argument, there are two evils common with the wise man and the fool: (1) Oblivion, the persons and doings both of the wise and foolish shall be forgotten in succeeding ages. (2) Death, which seizes on the wise man as well as on the fool, verse 16.

This agreement between wisdom and folly is amplified by the effect it wrought in Solomon, viz, A hatred of life, as a thing not lovely nor desirable, if it be separated from all true contentment, which he could not find in anything under the sun; all being evil, i.e., troublesome, grievous, vain and vexing, verse 17. Wherein Solomon shows that himself did, and every man will do, as he is a natural man, viz, rather wish for death than miss of comfort and happiness in his life, and desire rather than not to be, than to be perpetually unhappy.

***Solomon's second judgment of this knowledge touches the enjoyment of all things in***

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<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 17:24.

<sup>19</sup> In regard of prosperity or adversity arising in this life, & c.

***this life:***

Solomon first shows “the evil” in men’s labor under the sun, and second the only good that can be found in any worldly thing.

*First, what is the evil:* Herein Solomon expresses what is evil in man’s labor under the sun, in getting greatness and an abundance of earthly pleasures and possessions: This he sets down showing, the particulars wherein this evil consists.

The first evil is a necessary divorce to be made between us and all that we enjoy. Death will part us asunder, and we must leave our labor to our posterity, “Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.” Eccl. 2:18.

The second evil is our impotency in disposing that we leave behind, there and in that manner as we desire. None can tell what will become of his goods, honors, pleasures, when he is dead, what his heir will be, and how he will dispose of things, wisely or foolishly: But be he wise or foolish, he must be master and ruler of all. If he is wise, he will think himself wiser than his ancestors, and change, translate, and alter all in a new fashion (as seldom our forefathers works please us). If a fool, he will quickly waste and consume all that the father’s wisdom shall soon come to naught by the son’s folly. Eccl. 2:19.

The third evil is the unequal condition of heir and his predecessor, viz, that what the one hath been a long time gathering, by all wise, skillful, provident, and just courses; the other in a day or moment comes to enjoy without all labor, care and pains taking, and this is a singular vanity and evil, that a man by sitting still and doing nothing, may get as much and have as much contentment as another by all his provident and lawful labor. Eccl. 2:21.

The fact of the evil is amplified and proved that the disadvantage lies on the predecessor’s part; set down in a question and answer:

**Question:** What has that man (i.e., predecessor), what commodities [*advantages*] has he of his labor more than the others? Eccl. 2:22.

**Answer:** Nothing more in contentment, much more in toil and trouble; labor in the day, weariness in labor, cares and thoughts in the night, and this to advance posterity, for whom he is a true drudge and purveyor, that they may enjoy with ease what he hath with care and anxiety gotten together. And therefore in this case they that get and have most, cannot yet be so happy as their posterity, which is vanity. Eccl. 2:23.

***What is that only good that can be found in worldly things?***

Having looked at the evil which flows from worldly things, Solomon turns to show the good which can be found in worldly things. The world is not mere rack and engine to torment men’s minds and bodies; some comfort is to be found in the use of earthly things, which comfort Solomon sets forth in verses 24-26. In a word, it is that which, 1 Tim 6 is called contentation [contentment, ed.] joined with godliness, this only makes a man master of the utmost comfort worldly things can afford: Touching this most excellent virtue (the very soul that puts life into all earthy things) we are to note:

*Its description, verse 24:* By this principal parts of it: First, a free and liberal use of the creature, *that he eat and drink*. Secondly, a cheerful mind, joyfully resting itself in the present state and use of things, *that he makes his soul enjoy good* . . . Both which are opposite

niggardliness, greedy and wide desires, endless and restless projects for further matters, murmuring and repining at present condition, and other daughters and nurses of an unhappy and discontented heart.

*Its commendation and excellency:* First, in fountain and the cause, it is a gift from the hand of God himself, and therefore firstly a very special favor. Secondly, not in the power of worldly things to give, verse 24. Abundance doth not breed contentment, which Solomon proves by his own experiences, verse 25. No man could enjoy more than he did, and have better means to procure easy and speedy delights in all his labor: But for himself he finds that there is no comfort but that which arises from the contented use of things, so that it was not in his own power to procure, but from God's blessing, and by means of it, his heart did rejoice in all his labor, as it is, verse 11.

Second, in the subject of it, the godly man, *to him that is good*, and sincerely good, *in his sight*, God gives *wisdom and knowledge* to get and provide and *joy in using*.

To show that it is the godly man who take enjoyment in worldly things, Solomon contrasts the position of the wicked man or sinner, who wants [*lacks*] wisdom in getting: in that which rests labor and immoderate cares, *he gives travail*, he wearies himself not only to gather, but to heap up with vast and immeasurable desires. Wherein also he is a fool, in that he does so willingly travail and drudge, and thinks that toil his happiness, which God hath laid on him as a vexation and punishment *he gives*. Eccl. 2:26.

Therefore, the wicked man also lacks, comfort in enjoying: Himself shall take little benefit by his gettings, but living or dead, they shall be translated to the use of the godly, for whom he least of provided them. (Sometimes good men's riches also taken away, threatened to Hezekiah.) This also, i.e., this travail and lot of the wicked is vanity. Eccl. 2:26.

## **SECOND COURSE OF INVESTIGATION TO PROVE THE INABILITY OF ANYTHING IN CREATION TO MAKE MEN HAPPY: RESTING IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE AS A BASIS FOR CONTENTMENT: ECCLESIASTES 3:1-15**

In this section, Solomon makes four arguments which demonstrate that a man should obtain contentment from resting in the providence of God: (1) All things result from the decree and foreappointment of God. (2) The excellency of God's working in the government of all things. (3) That which God has foreordained will necessarily come to pass. (4) God is constant in his management of all things.

In short, that which is good can only come from God (James 1:17). God is in full control, and "all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28 (NASB 95)).

The man without confidence in the providence of God is constantly in fear that things may turn out poorly. The man who rests in the providence of God can always rest knowing that God is in full control.

### **Text:**

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-15: 1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. 9 What profit has he that works in that wherein he labours? 10 I have seen the travail, which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.*

*11 He has made every thing beautiful in his time: also he has set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end. 12 I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. 13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God. 14 I know that, whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God does it, that men should fear before him. 15 That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been; and God requires that which is past.*

### **Commentary:**

The arguments which Solomon brings us to persuade to contentation [*contentment*]

without estate and portion [*without property or other external worldly “good”*]; which are taken from God’s providence and government and administration of all things: the faith and mediation whereof is a single and enforcing motive to contentment. Solomon gives four arguments:

***First, from the decrees and foreappointment of God:***

God ordains the time and manner to every event under heaven. The reason stands thus: If all things in the world depend on the disposing of a higher providence than that of man, which hath appointed the certain time, as their being, so of their conversion and change, then is no profit to man in his labor, but a contented resting in that which God sends.

The sequel is most manifest, seeing it were madness and folly to disquiet and vex ourselves with hopes, fears, projects, anxious contrivances and prosecutions about that whereto we have neither wisdom nor power to give either being or continuance.

*The minor* [premise<sup>20</sup>] is: Set down, v. 1, every thing there is a set and prefixed item or season: Yea to those things that may seem most contingent<sup>21</sup>, not only natural things but all voluntary actions which depend on man’s election, counsel and will, it is not in our power to do what and when and how long we would, but all within and without us depends on a secret providence for its beginning, continuance and end.

The particular instance is illustrated and proved by induction of many particulars, wherein these fatal seasons, changes and revolutions are daily seen. Instances are many, both in natural and voluntary things, verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, which we are to understand only according to the event what things fall out after God’s appointment, not the lawfulness or unlawfulness of them, what things should be by God’s commandment.

The conclusion is, verse 9, what profit . . . the same thought found in Matthew 6:27 *Which of you by taking thought*, in vain are all our purposes, counsels, devices, plots, doubting of ill success of confident persuasions of good such, if we think to work out our happiness by them, seeing when we have done all, all must depend on the determinate counsel of God, Prov. 27.1, Jer. 10:23, James 4:13, ergo [*therefore*], nothing better than patient waiting for, and cheerful contentment in the event however it fall out, suffering ourselves to be governed by God’s wisdom and good pleasure. This conclusion is amplified by the porlepsis [*response to an anticipated objection*] in the next verse.

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<sup>20</sup> Pemble sees Solomon proceeding in a way analogous to a syllogism with a major premise, a general statement of a rule: God ordains all things; a specific instance, a minor premise: the specific instances of God’s ordination shown in verses 3:2-8; and a conclusion: therefore, you must wait upon God.

<sup>21</sup> A thing which is “contingent” is a thing which does not necessarily have to take place or exist. A “contingent” thing would be some-thing supposedly not within the providence of God.

*Solomon then turns to an objection*<sup>22</sup>: If man have no profit of all his labor, but all come to pass by fate and destiny, to what purpose then should we take pains in any thing, why are we not idle. The solution is set forth in verse 10: We must notwithstanding labor and busy ourselves in all lawful endeavors and this first, by God's commandment who hath laid it on us. Secondly, for our good to be exercised, kept from idleness, sloth, pride & c. In brief, God's providence doth not exclude the use of lawful means, but implied them to be used with submission to his will.

***Second, an argument, from the excellency of God's working in the government and disposing of all things.*** God brings all things to pass in a most comely order in the most seasonable and fit opportunity, *beautiful in his time*, not only good, but beautiful, and if not in itself, yet in his time, all circumstances duly considered, most seemly, orderly and in every way befitting. Therefore, we have good reason to be contented, and like well of our condition, seeing that which is, is in its time the best and best fitting, verse 11. This point is cleared by removal of an objection: It seems not so (may some say), that matters are carried in such a decent order, many things fall out, whereof we can see no reason why they should be accounted so excellent. Hereto, Solomon answers partly:

*By denial, he hath set the world*<sup>23</sup> *in your hearts*. God hath not left himself without witness of his righteous, equal and beautiful ordering of things, but hath set it forth to be observed in the book of the world. And this he hath, *set in their hearts*, i.e, given man a large desire & also in power in good measure to comprehend and understand the history of nature, with the course of human affairs: So that if men did but give themselves to the exact observation of things, they might in most of them perceive an admirable order in their wise and beautiful contrivance.

*By concession*, that there are many things above our reason and apprehension, whereunto the eye of our understanding cannot pierce to find out the causes, means, and manner of their beginnings, proceedings and endings. These God hath shut up in his secret counsel, leaving us to admire them, and to judge of their equalness, by that which in other cases is easily discernable, verse 11.

***Third, an argument from the inevitable course of God's providence***, it being above our

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<sup>22</sup> Pemble is a very careful and often astute reader of Ecclesiastes. He notices the subtle shifts in voice in Solomon's argument throughout the book. Unless one pays very close attention to these shifts of perspective, one will easily misunderstand what is happening throughout the book. Another of Solomon's works The Song of Songs relies upon such shifting voices.

Solomon is not the only biblical author to utilize the questions or assertions of various speakers. For example, in his letter, Paul often explicitly or implicitly considers the criticisms or questions of various persons who would likely speak in response to Paul's assertions. While one may not always agree with Pemble's identification of speaker and positions, it is important to note that such shifting positions do exist. Ed.

<sup>23</sup> All modern versions translate this word as "eternity" rather than "world". Ed.

power to resist or alter it, *what God does shall be forever*, in the decree, or use or end or forever, i.e., so long as God will, not to be changed and undone when man will: in whose power it is not to add what he thinks defective, or take away what he imagines superfluous; that is to cross, disannull and turn aside the counsel of God, for the establishing of his own designements [designs, ed.]. This stedfastness God uses in his proceedings, *that men might fear before him*, i.e., not lean to their wisdom in pride and presumptuous resolutions, nor grow desperate in furious opposing God's work, not yet idle in neglect of all means, but with a contented and humble mind, to submit themselves to God's overruling power, referring themselves to his disposing, verse 14.

***Fourth, an argument from the perpetual constancy of God's provident administration of the world.*** *That which has been is now, & c.* God has not of late begun to use this course, neither has he dealt with former, nor will deal with later ages, otherwise then [sic] he does with the present: things are in the past, he seeks out and causes a circular revolution and return of all things in their convenient seasons. This is a great argument to contentment, *verse 15*.

***Fifth, a repetition of the first conclusion that nothing is better than contentment [contentment] and tranquillity of mind***, in the twelfth and thirteenth verse, where though it be repeated as a consequent of the second argument, yet it is to be understood as issuing from them all. The same thing then is repeated in these verses, which was delivered, verses 24, 25, of the second chapter, contentment being set forth by its

- A. Parts, rejoicing, eating and drinking, enjoying good of one's labor.
- B. Adjunct and companion, piety, doing of good.
- C. Cause, the gift of God: All implied by Solomon's own experience on this point, *I know . . .* And hitherto of the two first courses of obtaining happiness by knowledge and use of worldly things, both shewed to be insufficient and vain.

## **THIRD COURSE OF INVESTIGATION TO PROVE THE INABILITY OF ANYTHING IN CREATION TO MAKE MEN HAPPY: WORLDLY AUTHORITY INSUFFICIENT TO MAKE ONE HAPPY – ECCLESIASTES 3:1 - 4:16**

(Introduction by Pemble): Solomon now proceeds to the consideration of a third course, and that is, honors, greatness, authority and rule over others, which unto most seems the only happy thing in the world. Solomon proves that greatness by itself without goodness, i.e., wisdom and piety, is so far from making any man happy, as it make all both superiors and inferiors most miserable.

### **A GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF HUMAN GREATNESS: ECCLESIASTES 3:16-22**

#### **Text:**

*Ecclesiastes 3:16-22: 16 And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. 17 I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work. 18 I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. 19 For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man has no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. 20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21 Who knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth? 22 Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?*

#### **COMMENTARY:**

##### **An Examination of Human Oppression:**

This point is declared generally, in all great ones that have in their hands power and authority over others. The miserable vanity whereof it is expressed in the common and almost unseparable adjunct or effect of such greatness, *that is*, oppression, wrong and injustice. Now an oppressor, a tyrant, can never be happy, whatever other may deem of his pomp and power, they are but glorious miseries. Touching this point of oppression in men of great place and office, Solomon

*First, propounds what he saw* (as well in his own as in other countries, by observation and by relation of stories, and chiefly by inspiration) commonly practiced by magistrates

themselves, and that in the very place of judgment and justice. Those men and place that should be the sanctuary of the distressed and wronged, were the maintainers and practicers of iniquity and public injustice. Here is an argument *a majoris ad minus*<sup>24</sup>. If magistrates be protectors of laws, then much more other potent [*having power*] persons not so merely bound to their observation, and if magistrates at the tribunal, then most more at other times, & c., so easily doth all greatness corrupt itself with violence and injustice, *verse 16*.

***Second, passes his censure on those dealing two ways:***

He first passes censure according to the judgment of God's Spirit, teaching both what patience we must have under such oppression, and what severity God will use against such oppressors. God will judge the righteous, *ergo* [Latin, *therefore*], much more the wicked. So that these violent and unequal courses shall lose us nothing if we wait on God; nor gain them anything through the severity of his displeasure. This proceedings of God against them is proved by the certain and infallible government of the Divine providence, *there is a time there*<sup>25</sup>, *i.e.*, with God before his Tribunal, *for every purpose and every work* when in due season all their cruel devices and consultations, and all their bloody and unjust practices for devouring the poor, shall be called to account, doomed and damned, *verse 17*.

*Secondly, he passes censure according to the judgment of carnal reason*, which draws hence ill conclusions, tending to the overthrow of government, and all right of superiority and subjection amongst men.

This impious conclusion is first laid down, *verse 18, I said in my heart, viz.*, following the guide of humane discourse & corrupted reason (*concerning the estate, orders of men*), *viz.*, this distinction of ranks and degrees in government of superiors and subjection of inferiors, *that God might manifest them*, make it appear and lay them open to his judgments or (that God hath advanced them to dignity – whose vice-regents they claim themselves to be, or that God hath purged them) made them holy, but *to see*, as far as a man can judge by that which appears outwardly they are degenerated into beasts, and live no better than beasts do amongst and towards one another that they might see, upon discovery of their unmanly doings, that they are no better than beasts in their conditions and manners, and also in their natures, as the sequel implies. The second interpretation seems most natural, and from the significations of the word choice men set up in government as it were by God's appointment, but they are indeed but as stronger

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<sup>24</sup> That means an argument from the greater to the lesser. For example, in Romans 8:32 where Paul reasons that since God has already given to us the most precious of gifts, that is, Jesus Christ, won't God certainly give us lesser gifts? Here, Solomon's argument is that if magistrates are willing to corrupt the law in most important and public tasks, how much more will they be willing to be corrupt in private. And, if magistrates are willing to break the law, then the lesser persons who have the job only to follow the law (not to enforce the law) must also act in an unjust manner. Ed.

<sup>25</sup> The Hebrew syntax at this point is difficult. The handling of the syntax will greatly affect the manner in which one interprets this passage. A comparison of modern translations will demonstrate the variety of ways in which this section has been handled. Ed.

beasts preying upon the weaker.

The fact that oppressive men are but beasts is confirmed, by the weak and sophistical arguments from the common events and accidents both: the same thing happens to both: *ergo*, there is no preeminence of one above the other; the antecedent proved by particulars:

1. Death, as a brute beast dies, so does a man.
2. Cause of life, as a beast lives, so does man, they have both one breath, sense, motion, nourishment, breathing, all alike, & c., *verse 19*.
3. The master of their bodies, both the same, of the dust, both dissolved into the same, in the dust again, *verse 20*.
4. Their form or soul, both have the same. For whereas men talk of an immortal soul of man, which severed from the body ascends up to heaven, and that the soul of the brute beast descends downward, that it falls and perishes together with the body: they do but speak by guess, who knows it, who ever saw it, what anatomist can find it out? *verse 21*.

Solomon then looks to see what do impious men conclude from the fact that they are but beasts?<sup>26</sup> The atheist concludes that seeing men are in the same condition for their nature that the brute beast are, they should likewise be the same for the point of government, and that every man should live without the bonds of law, of government, of subjection, as brute creatures do. What preeminence hath a man above a brute beast? *Ergo*, what preeminence should one man claim above another?

This leads such men to Epicurism and sensuality, *verse 22*. Seeing a man and a beast are alike, there is then nothing better for a man than do as the beast does, cast all care away for future times, and look to those things are *ante pedes* \*\*\*\*\*, live voluptuously and give content to all natural and sensual desires: for, this is all the good he can enjoy whilst he lives<sup>27</sup>.

This leads to an objection and answer:

**Objection:** But there is something after this life to be looked for.

**Answer:** Who can tell? Who can shew a man what shall be after death? Wherefore, let us eat and drink, for we must die tomorrow, and when we are dead all dies with us.

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<sup>26</sup> Pemble takes the substance of verse 23 to be the materialist's, the atheist's conclusion: If I'm just going to die, then what's the point? *Ed*.

<sup>27</sup> Take his pleasure while he may, seeing he is like to be oppressed while he lives. *Et post more tem nihil*.

## **ANALYSIS OF PARTICULAR INSTANCES OF OPPRESSION AND HUMAN AUTHORITY: ECCLESIASTES 4:1-16**

Chapter 4 considers the nature of human greatness. Verses 1-3 address the question of external oppression. In verses 4-11, the focus shifts from the oppressive rulers to the lives of the subjects under oppressive rule: Either one simply refuses to participate (the sluggard) or seeks to somehow win the rat race (the workaholic, if you will). Finally, the focus turns from the common man to the king in verses 13-16 which demonstrate that even at the top there is vanity.

## THE FACT OF HUMAN OPPRESSION: ECCLESIASTES 4:1-3

### Text:

*Ecclesiastes 4:1-3: 1 So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. 2 Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. 3 Yea, better is he than both they, which has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.*

### Commentary:

Take a review of the nature of oppression, with some more particulars hereon depending. Here then we have to be considered an aggravation of the miserable vexation of poor oppressed people under cruel and tyrannical governors, *verse 1*.

This point is amplified by the greatness of the oppression: They were oppressed not only to grief and complaining, but also to tears<sup>28</sup>. The fact of oppression is further demonstrated in the helpless estate of regard of: (a) Others who were incompassionate. (b) Their oppressors, which had power and might on their side to crush them and keep them under, but no pity to relieve and support they, *or, yet no comforter*; though helpless and weak, most inhumane, seeing we naturally pity a lark in a kite's claw, or a silly lamb in a lion's mouth.

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<sup>28</sup> Is. 59:16; Jer. 26:27.

## THE HARM WHICH FLOWS FROM EVIL LEADERS: ECCLESIASTES 4:4-12

The effect of human government upon human happiness and suffering is repeatedly considered in Ecclesiastes. Such a fact is not to be surprising if one understands Solomon to be the author of the book. Some of the difficulty in understanding Ecclesiastes undoubtedly stems from the fact that the reader does not consistently consider that a *king* is writing the work.

The direct relationship between oppression, government and human greatness seems to be missing as we move from oppression to the lives of the man who won't work and the man who won't stop working. Solomon does not explicitly state that the problems portrayed in verses 4-12 have any direct relationship to what comes before or after.

However, the lack of a direct statement that the life of the lazy man and the life of the miser are not directly related to oppression and government does not mean that such a relationship does not exist. The question of evil government is first broached in Ecclesiastes 3:16. Oppression is specifically considered in 4:1-3. The question of the king is addressed immediately after our section in verses 4:13-16.

Moreover, in other places Solomon shifts from the conduct of the government and the life of the individual. In chapter 5:8 the subject of oppression is again raised. It is followed by the king's conduct and the life of the laborer (5:12). In 10:16, Solomon explicitly ties problems with the common people with the problems of the government. Indeed, experience demonstrates that the conduct of the government can easily have direct affects upon the moral quality of the people. The Old Testament histories are explicit testimony to the connection between government and the moral life of the kindgom.

### Text:

***Ecclesiastes 4:4-12:*** 4 Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit. 5 The fool folds his hands together, and eats his own flesh. 6 Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. 8 There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he has neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither says he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail. 9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? 12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

### Commentary:

Other evil consequents and effects that work in subjects, and those of inferior rank, either privately or publicly.

Privately, in those that feel this smart, viz., weariness of life; for so natural reason judges, that the case is better with the dead, howsoever dead, that are freed from this tyranny; than with the living that feel it: Yes, that it is better never to have been at all, than to be born to such misery, verses 2, 3.

Publicly, in others as well as the oppressed: and these are two: idleness or excessive work.

*Idleness and neglect of labor in men's callings.* Under unjust and bad government, a miserable people are quite disheartened and discouraged from all worthy and painful endeavors, and so cast off all care, and betake themselves to idleness: in this evil note:

*The ground motive that draw men to idleness verse 4,* that men's labors and travails, their straight and right dealings, their virtuous and noble endeavors after any eminent degree of excellency in any kind whatsoever get them nothing but envy and molestation, both from equals and superiors. If a man be rich, his wealth brings him in danger. If wise, learned, valiant, just, he is suspected, disgraced, as not well brooking the corruption of the state. So that in such a commonwealth all generous motions are easily nipped and kept under<sup>29</sup>; when the putting forward of oneself but draw only others' envious eyes and slanderous tongues, contempt and disgrace instead of honor; which is a great vanity and vexation to a good mind.

*The practice of idleness, the fool folds his hands,* in his bosom under his arms, in his pockets, i.e., *metonym signi* [reference to something by naming one of its attributes], he refuses to take pains; which is not done without stretching forth the hands<sup>30</sup>, Prov. 31:19-20. This is amplified by the effect of it, *he eats his own flesh*, i.e., he wastes and consumes himself, bringing poverty on his estate, sickness on his body, violent death by lewd [bad, worthless, vile] and filching [stealing] courses. He that does this is pronounced here to be a fool, without grace; which teaches us painfulness [*to be painstaking*] and industry in our places: without which would in reason that a man should not starve himself, because another will unjustly take part of his provision, not willingly beggar himself, because against his will he must help to enrich another man, *verse 15*.

*The pretence for idleness verse 6.* He has for his defense a proverbial sentence, *Better is a handful*, in its true meaning, not much differing from that, Prov. 17.1. But here applied by the sluggard in an ill construction, as who should say, Better is a penny by begging than two pence by true labor. Wherein the fool is deceived; first in his miscalling his sloth and idleness by the name of rest, quietness, and also misterming labor by the name of vexation of spirit, as if contentment and painstaking were opposite. Secondly, that he thinks it is better to be without good things, than be at some trouble in getting them, and some unjust molestation from others in enjoying them.

*The effect of idleness:* Overthrow of humane society: when all catch, each one shifts for one, the people follow their rules, whom they see to be all for themselves, and nothing for the

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<sup>29</sup> As in Russia, Turkey, pesantry of France, & c.

<sup>30</sup> Or they that compose themselves to sleep. Prov. 26:15

public. So they scrape together what they can get, but will part with nothing.

*The response of misers:* Wherein they are in the other extreme opposite to the idle persons, who is good neither for public nor private, these take immoderate pains, but all for private, without any respect to common benefit.

This disease (of being a miser) Solomon describes unto us in such person as may in this kind seem most notable: *viz.*, a miserable scraping covetous drudge, whether he be [a] private person or public governor, that is all for himself, and extremely having when there is no cause, *verse 8*, where note this man's

1. Solitariness. He is one and that without a second, *he hath neither child nor brother*, neither kindred or alliance, nor acquaintance and friends: or if they have, yet he neither seeks to help them nor help from them; but lives like a man in a wilderness.
2. His excess (notwithstanding his loneliness) both in labor and desire, *there is no end*, the less he needs, the more he seeks after.
3. His inconsiderateness and folly in his courses, making himself miserable, and not perceiving it; *he saith not for who*. he labors for that whereof he himself makes no use, nor any else shall whilst he lives, and when he is dead who shall, he knows not. *Bereave my soul of good* in the cheerful and sociable and imparting of what he has.

Solomon censures the vanity of miserliness with a witness<sup>31</sup>, it is a sore, hard and greivous travail, *verse 8*, and such as Solomon could not make without great heedfulness, *I return, & c., verse 7*.

Solomon underscores the vanity of being a miser with an illustrates by its contrary, *viz.*, Society and community of life showing the evils and discommodities of a solitary, by the good and benefit of a sociable life, which is set down.

Generally, in that axiom, *Two are better than one*, i.e., society is better than privacy and solitariness: the general reason is added, *They have a good reward for their labor*, i.e., men living together in loving communion and fellowship reap more benefit by their labor than others: *viz.*, others direction, encouragement, and assistance, rejoicing both in getting and enjoying, they labor with more cheerfulness, possess with more security and content[ment], *verse 9*.

Particularly in some chief commodities that arise unto us by the company and society of others; specified in three instances or similitudes<sup>32</sup>:

*First illustration:* Of two employed in one labor, journey, or other business, when some mishap befalls one of them, as a dangerous fall, lameness, sickness. His fellow and companion

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<sup>31</sup> The phrase "with a witness" is meant to emphasize the statement. Ed.

<sup>32</sup> Disciples sent two by two.

will relieve him: which if he want [lack, ed.], woe to him, he perishes and sinks under his misfortune. So by this public society, we have help in adversities that befall us from the love and friendship of friends and well-willers, who will pity and support us in our trouble and ill-fare: but a solitary covetous wretch is hated and foresaken of all, having not a friend to stand to him, *verse 10.*

*Second illustration:* Of two lying together in cold weather, they get and give heat each to [the] other; if both lay alone, they might lie a-cold<sup>33</sup>. This is another benefit of society, help in dispatch of our business and affaires: when many men's heads, and hands, and purses goes on more wisely succeeds more happily. But one alone, how more wisely, succeeds more happily. But one alone, how can he avoid many inconveniences? This is true in spiritual as well as civil affairs, *Hebrews 10.24, verse 11.*

*Third illustration:* Of two contending or fighting: if a man alone be assaulted he may be vanquished; but if he have a second, he may make his part good with him<sup>34</sup>: or, if not so, yet with the help of a third, he will surely overcome him: According to the proverb, A threefold cord, treble twisted, is not hastily broken. A third benefit of society, help and succor against dangers that we fear will come on us, wherein a man sociable and beloved of others, shall have their aid and protection to defend him<sup>35</sup>: whereas a man that lives only to himself, without intercourse of mutual duties with others, lies open to all disadvantages, having no man that will step in between him and his adversary to ward off a blow, but rather all will lay on more load, *verse 12.*

**Conclusion to the section:** Thus, society is necessary at all times, and in all courses of life, which men by tyrannical, unjust and covetous dealing seek to overthrow, looking more to their private than the common good.

So much of the vanities that attend upon greatness in general, now follows in:

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<sup>33</sup>Abishag lying with David. 1 Kings 1.

<sup>34</sup> As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man's friends, & c. Prov. 27.17.

<sup>35</sup> Joab and Abishai, 2 Sam. 10.11.

## NOT EVEN KINGLY DIGNITY PROVIDES TRUE HAPPINESS: ECCLESIASTES 4:13-16

We can easily think that money, fame or power can create happiness. However, since such efforts are themselves based upon the vanity of the world, they cannot make one happy. Therefore, not even the king can be assured of happiness when he rests his hope upon being a king.

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes 4:13-16: 13 Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. 14 For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becomes poor. 15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. 16 There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

### COMMENTARY:

A special [that is, a particular] instance of human greatness as a potential source for happiness: that most eminent degree of greatness and power whereto a man can ascend, and wherein above anything men think happiness to be found, and that is the kingly dignity, the vanity and weakness whereof in regard of true felicity, Solomon a king describes:

***First, in the state and person of a foolish king, the glory of whose place and dignity can never make him so happy as his folly will make him miserable.*** Wherefore, Solomon doth greatly debase and bring this his outward royalty and magnificence in disgrace, preferring one of his meanest subjects before him, *verse 13 and 14*, where we have the

*Comparison, the parties compared on one side.* First, a subject; second, a child or young man; thirdly, a poor child for wealth and riches, both great occasions of contempt; but fourthly, a wise child, discreet and religious: On the other side: First, a king; secondly, an old king; thirdly, a rich and potent king, all arguments of admiration and honor: fourthly, but a foolish king, i.e., that will not be admonished, that can give himself no good counsel, nor will take any from others: and such a one must needs be foolish and wicked. These two laid in the balance, Solomon saith, that such a child weighs heavier in goodness and excellency than such a king, *verse 13*.

*A confirmation of the comparison* by the different events that befall them both, *viz.*, advancement of the one from the mean estate, low degree, *out of prison*, to honor of a scepter and dignity of a prince. Psalm 113, *as Joseph, Daniel, David*; the ruin and disposing of the other, *he that is born in his kingdom*, or born a king, becomes a beggar, a bondman; as this is true of kings, so of all inferior greatness: Gentlemen born, die beggars; and a beggar by birth, proves a gentleman by his virtue and industry, *verse 14*.

*In the condition of all kings*, whether wise or foolish, whose contentment in their royal dignity, depending much on the affection of their people towards them can never be entire, so long as they are insatiable and fickle in their desires. But so they are unconstant, affecting

changes, loathing the present, hoping for better under new governors, ready from dislike to fall to revolt and defection & c., which Solomon proves.

*First proof of the point that a king's contentment depends upon things outside his control:* By his own experience, *I have seen*, it may be in his own particular, though he were a most excellent king, *all the living which walk under the Sun, viz.*, the present generation, *with which the child that shall stand up in his stead*, with the heir that shall succeed him in the kingdom, *with him*, they join themselves, him they follow, flatter, praise, admire as the sun-rising; having almost deposed his father in their favor and affection, *verse 15*.

*Second proof of the point that a king's contentment depends upon things outside his control:* By the perpetual unconstant humor of the people, *there is no end, viz.*, not so much in succession of generations, as settledness of resolution and contentment with the present estate: they must have something they know not what, better or worse than what they now have (to all the people) to the multitude giddy and light-headed: that this disease is heredity to all people, he shows by parts, both such as in the former age disliked the father in hope of the son; and in the latter ages, that cast off the son in expectation of the grandchild, and so still downward, *verse 16*.

*The censure follows*, that certainly this is vanity and vexation; a marvellous discontent and grief to a king, to see himself disrespected, his age condemned, and his name account grown out of request: at least, always to see upon how inconstant a foundation his honor is reared up, *viz.*, the grace and favor of the people. How violent and jealous affections these things have stirred up in kings, all stories and experience of times shew, *verse 16*.

## EXCURSUS: PROPER WORSHIP: ECCLESIASTES 5:1-8

(Introduction by Pemble) Before Solomon proceeds to the fourth way to happiness, viz., *Riches*: in this first part of the chapter he interlaceth a notable digression touching the true worship of God, as a direction for the right use, and remedy against all corruptions incident to these four courses which men usually take to get happiness. In this digression we may observe the worship of God:

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes 5:1-8: 1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream comes through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*

*4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he has no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better is it that thou should not vow, than that thou should vow and not pay. 6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God. 8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regards; and there be higher than they.*

### COMMENTARY:

#### THREE PARTS OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD CONSIDERED:

*First, the manner of right performing of religious services, specified unto us in three particular parts of the worship of God;*

#### Consideration of Sacrifices:

*The first particular part of the worship of God: Sacrifices* under which is comprehended the whole stock of public worship of God, instituted under the Law. Concerning the right observation whereof, Solomon gives us these precepts:

In sacrifices we are to prepare ourselves, and advisely to consider what we go about, *Take heed to thy foot*, from travelers walking in such ways as it is easy to step out of the right way, or stumble and fall in it; and such are all religious duties to us, who by reason of corruption quickly go aside in doing them; *ergo*, we are advised to take heed to our hearts, our affections, thoughts,

intentions, behaviors. *When we go into the house of God*, temple or synagogue where God is publicly worshipped<sup>36</sup>.

In sacrifices we are not to rest in outward work, but in the inward power of religion. There being two parts of God's worship, *viz.*, mercy and sacrifice; or, obedience and ceremony, we are commanded to be more near or ready to *hear*, i.e., to understand, believe, obey and practice the will of God, revealed in the Law and Prophets read and expounded to us, *than to offer sacrifice*; to keep all legal and outward observations, without faith, sanctity, and reformation of life<sup>37</sup>. These precepts are enforced upon us by the disgrace and censure of such as neglect them, who are termed *fools*, hypocrites, carnal and wicked persons, devoid of grace and true understanding: And why so? *For they know not they do evil*. They do not know what, being ignorant by nature, quality, and end of God's worship, and so think they do God good service when they commit hateful sins and foul abominations, and such an one is deservedly to be styled a wicked fool, *verse 1*<sup>38</sup>.

### **Consideration of Prayer:**

*The second particular part of the worship of God:* Prayer, and under that, all speeches of or unto God. Two points:

First point: Rule is that all inconsiderate rashness be avoided, serious and mature deliberation used, *Be not rash with thy mouth*; speak vainly, unadvisedly, hastily, thy tongue running before thy wit; babble not, be not bold in affirming what are ignorant of, & c. How shall this be? Let thy heart guide thy tongue, *let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God*, ponder in thy mind, apprehend matters thoroughly, set thy thoughts in order before thou give leave to thy tongue to utter them, especially in God's hearing. Raw, undigested, and tumultuary meditations vent themselves in wide, wandering and idle discourse. This precept is confirmed by a reason from the quality of God, to, or of whom we speak, and of ourselves, *God is in heaven*, glorious, wise, powerful, in place of highest excellence and majesty: *thou art on earth*, a weak, unwise, unworthy creature, infinitely inferior in degree unto thy Creator: and therefore it becomes thee not to speak of him but with greatest fear, reverence, and advisedness. We know how mean men speak of kings and nobles, & c.

Second point: Rule is in our speeches to use few words: So to couch our discourse, that all lavish superfluous talkativeness be avoided, all needlessness and heartless repetitions, unnecessary digressions, tedious prolixity, to the wearying of ourselves and others be shunned, *verse 2*. This rule is pressed upon us by two reasons:

First reason for this rule, God's dignity, our baseness, *therefore*, the subject must deliver their minds to kings in brief terms. Second reason for this rule: From the subject wherein, or root from whence multiplicity of words comes, *viz.*, he is a fool that useth it, and folly is the cause of it; which is illustrated by comparison: As dreams and vain fancies in the night spring from

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<sup>36</sup> Exod. 3:5; John 3.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Sam. 15:22; Psalm 50:8; Zech. 7:4 & 5; Matth. 15; Is. 58:4.

<sup>38</sup> Prov. 15:8.

variety and multitude of business in the day, so does much talk<sup>39</sup> and multitude of words discover a foolish heart and witless head, *verse 3*.

### **Consideration of Vows:**

***The third particular of the worship of God considered:*** *Vows*, for the right making and keeping whereof we have two precepts delivered unto us:

*First precept as to vows:* That we do lawfully vow, we take heed to perform it, and that speedily without delay, *When thou vowest a vow to God, defer not to pay it*<sup>40</sup>. This rule is backed by two reasons:

*The first reason we must promptly fulfill our vows:* From God's displeasure with such as break promise, and keep not their day with him, *he hath no pleasure in fools*. He is greatly offended with such fools as these, that think to mock, deceive, and cozen him: *Ergo*, pay what thou vowest, *verse 4*. *The second reason we must promptly fulfill our vows:* By comparison with a safer and less dangerous course: seeing the making of vows is a thing that we are not bound to, it is better to make none at all, than to make and not keep, *verse 5*.

*The second precept as to vows:* That we avoid all rash vows, unadvisedly, ignorantly, and sinfully made, when either we vow unlawful things, but after repent us, and seek for shifts and excuses; or in things sinful and unlawfull: *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*; bring not on thyself the guilt of sin by inconsiderate vowing: *Nor say before the Angel, i.e., Christ the searcher of the heart, who will admit no excuses: or, the Angel, i.e., messenger of God, viz., the priest before whom the errors of rash vows were to be confessed. Lev. 5:45. That it was an error, an oversight, he knew not well what he vowed: Ergo, requires pardon for not performing it. Reasons hereof are:*

*The first reason we should avoid rash vows:* God's anger against offenders in this kind, shewed, *in destorying the work of thy hands, i.e., crossing and defeating their purposes, counsels, and endeavors for accomplishing whereof these vows were inconsiderately made, verse 6*.

*The second reason we should avoid rash vows:* The vanity and folly of such rash promises and simple excuses afterward<sup>41</sup>; compared to the idle fancies in the multitude of confused dreams, *verse 7*.

### ***General Consideration of All Worship of God:***

So the manner to be observed in religious duties now follows: First, the *ground* and cause which brings forth the right observation and performance of religious duties in the former and all other kinds, *viz., the fear of God, But fear God* – this being the beginning of true piety and wisdom.

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<sup>39</sup> In many words there cannot want wickedness. Prov. 10:19.

<sup>40</sup> Deut. 23:21. Jacob deferred his vow. Gen. 34 & 35:1-2. Psalms 66:13-14.

<sup>41</sup> Or, this may be a third precept against multiplicity of vows.

Second, the effect of true religion, viz., *patience* in regard of wrong and oppression<sup>42</sup>: *If thou sees & c. marvel not at it*, count it no strange thing, as if that were just cause to doubt and distrust of God's providence, and to fall from him. The reason is, *for he that higher than the highest, viz., God himself, regardeth to punish in due time*<sup>43</sup>, *and there be higher than they, viz., angels whom God sets as the subordinate ministers over kingdoms and kings, to execute his judgment on tyrants and oppressors.*

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<sup>42</sup> 1 Peter 4:12.

<sup>43</sup> Psalm 12:7; 34; Matt. 18.

## **FOURTH COURSE OF INVESTIGATION TO PROVE THE INABILITY OF ANYTHING IN CREATION TO MAKE MEN HAPPY: RICHES: 5:9 - 6:12**

After this digression, Solomon returns to the fourth way, wherein men usually look to find true happiness, that is, riches and possessions, goods of fortune. In this section, Solomon will consider the following topics:

In 5:9-10, he will briefly consider the types of riches which a man acquires and the relative value of such riches. In 5:11-17, Solomon will note the vanity of riches. In 5:18-20, Solomon will discuss the right use of riches. And in Ecclesiastes 6:1-12, Solomon will show how not to use riches.

## A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF THE TYPES OF RICHES: ECCLESIASTES 5:9-10

Verse 9 has been a difficult passage for interpretation, both as to the proper rendering of the Hebrew text and connection the verse holds to the rest of the passage. Many commentators connect verse 9 to the verse 8 as part of the understanding of the nature of oppression. Pemble connects verse 9 to the verse 10 and sees verses 9 and 10 as contrasting types of wealth.

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes 5:9-10: 9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. 10 He that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loves abundance with increase: this is also vanity.*

### COMMENTARY:

Solomon notes that there are two types of riches: The first type of riches are such things as immediately concern the maintenance of man's life, as all provision for back and belly, arising from the earth, tillage, plantation, breeding of cattle. The second type of riches are such as are but the instruments and means for the procuring of the forenamed necessities, money, jewels, et cetera.

Solomon treats [considers] of both sorts: In verses 9-10, Solomon compares these two kinds together, showing the excellency of the fruits and increase of the earth, in corn, cattle, above all pecuniary possessions, albeit men commonly choose to have abundance of the latter rather than the former. They are far the better he proves:

First, by their common and general use, as that which is best is most common, *the profit of the earth is for all*, supplies all necessities for our lives and for that of all people that upon it, which the earth as a kind of mother, feeds and nourishes. Tillage is the life and blood of the commonwealth; that overthrown, all dies with it. This is amplified by the instance in that kind of men who, if any, might seem by reason of their great prerogatives and privileges to be exempted from dependance upon the husbandman, *viz.*, kings, they also are served and maintained by the field and fruits thereof. Many nations have not the use of money, nor is it absolutely needful in any, but so are the revenues of the earth among all, *verse 9*.

Second, by their singular goodness and efficacy in relieving our wants and necessities, they have that goodness and virtue in them, as of themselves they maintain our lives, and satisfy all desires of nature. Illustrated by the contrary disability of money, which per se cannot supply any of our wants, but only by exchange, *he that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver*, he cannot fill his belly, nor clothe his back with it, though he love it never so much; no nor he that loves abundance of money and treasure cannot be satisfied *with the increase* of his wealth, he may die for hunger, and starve for cold upon a heap of money; and therefore this love of money is a vain and unprofitable thing, *verse 10*.

## THE VANITY OF RICHES, PART I: ECCLESIASTES 5:11-17

In verses 9-10, Solomon shows that products are more useful than money because you can't eat gold and you can't wear enough silver to keep warm. However, even though cattle is more valuable than gold and food is more valuable than silver, no amount of stuff will ever be sufficient to make one truly happy.

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes 5:11-17: 11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? 12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. 13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. 14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begets a son, and there is nothing in his hand. 15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. 16 And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit has he that has labored for the wind? 17 All his days also he eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.*

### COMMENTARY:

Solomon proves the vanity and weakness of both sorts of riches, by many arguments in this and the next chapter by a "special" argument (that is a particular instance) and a "general" argument.

#### The "Special" Argument:

Special, concerning the first kind of wealth, standing in the increase of the earth, corn, wine, oil, cattle, & c. the abundance whereof is proved to be vain, by comparing the condition of the owner and master, with that of the farmer or servant, shepherd or hinde [*a hired hand\*\*??*] or other attendants upon the family: The argument is thus: If the owner have no more true commodity by his abundance, than those that are but his ministers and instruments in doing of his business, then is this abundance of no more worth of true happiness et cetera. The sequel is manifest, seeing a man may be as happy without it, as he that has it. The minor<sup>44</sup> is declared by parts:

First, in the outward use of these things for back & belly, further than which there virtue extends not. Now in this master and servant is alike, *When goods increase they are increased that eat them*, many hands must be set a-work, many mouths must be fed, many backs clothed, so

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<sup>44</sup> That is, the minor premise, the particular instance of the general rule. The reference is to the second line of a syllogism.

that others have their share in this abundance as well as the owner, yea, as much as he, for what has he more than they, but the *beholding of it with his eyes?* To please himself in the looking upon his possession, his corn-fields, his vineyards, his flocks and herds, and say, All this is mine: and that is a poor contentment: Otherwise a servant, a stranger may view his grounds, walk in his gardens with as much delight as the owner can do himself. Verse 11.

Second, In the inward quietness and cheerfulness of the mind in which it is not so well with the master as it is with the servant, as appears by one special consequent of a quiet mind, *viz., sleep: The sleep of the laboring man is sweet and pleasant, whether he eat little or much*, if little, his labor breeds rest; if much, his body being strong and hardened by labor, causes easy digestion and uninterrupted sleep and both ways his mind is still free from cares: *but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep*, as his body is overcharged with intemperate diet, so his heart is filled with cares and fears, a full body and an unquiet brain suffers him to take no rest in the night *verse 12*.

### **The General Argument:**

General, belonging to all kinds of riches. These arguments are taken:

#### *Riches Actually Cause Problems:*

First, from the discommodities and dangers that riches bring unto rich men, *There is a sore evil*, an evil sickness, or an evil bringing sickness, sorrow and grief. *Riches kept for their owners thereof to their hurt*, that which they look to have happiness by, is the occasion of their ruin and misery: Riches fill the heart with pride, the body with diseases through luxurious and idle living; the life with disorder and dissoluteness they expose a man to violent robberies, false accusations, and oppression of the more potent, which evils befall not only the bad, but many of them, the good also<sup>45</sup>, *verse 13*.

#### *Riches Cause Anxiety:*

Second, from the uncertainty of their abode with us while we live: when we have them we are not sure of them, *and they perish by evil travail*<sup>46</sup>, by our own folly & improvident courses, or by many casualties in trafficking at home and abroad, or by some secret curse wasting a man's estate. So that a great and well settled estate is many times suddenly overturned, a man undone and his posterity beggared. *He begat a son*, who should have all, and hold up the house, *and in his hand is nothing, i.e.*, the father has nothing to leave him to live, *verse 14*.

#### *You Can't Take Riches With You*

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<sup>45</sup>Naboth.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Tim. 6; Prov. 23:5.

Third, from the certainty of their forsaking of us when we die; they may leave us while we live, when we die we must leave them. Whatsoever comfort they can give us, it is but for the time of our life, they have no power to free us from death, or to convey unto us any help and comfort after death. A most powerful argument to disable riches from ever affecting our true happiness<sup>47</sup>.

This vanity of riches is described by comparison of our birth and death together, we shall go as we came. We came in to the world naked, and bought nothing with us, and it is certain we shall go out naked, and carry nothing hence, *verse 15*.

The vanity of riches is aggravated by its greatness, *it is a sore evil*, a miserable vexation, *viz.*, to a rich man that hath a covetous mind, loves and trusts in his riches, *that in all points must go as he came*. Why? The reason is added, he hath taken a great deal of pains in his life to no purpose and profit at his death. First, the pains and troubles that rich men, especially if covetous, put themselves in for-getting of wealth, is expressed, *verse 17*, *All his days he eats, gets and enjoys his wealth in darkness*<sup>48</sup>, that is, as the next words interpret it, *in much sorrow and wrath, foaming anger with or in his sickness, viz.*, distemper and disquietness of his heart and affections; all signify thus much that riches are got with many molestations of the body and mind. Secondly, the profit now that comes by all that is set down, *verse 16*. *What profit has he*, he has got not benefit at all *in laboring for wind*, embracing a shadow, grasping the air, catching at the wind; wearying himself for that which has no substance of true felicity in it.

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<sup>47</sup> 1 Tim. 6.7; Job 2.

<sup>48</sup> Is. 5:30.

## THE RIGHT USE OF RICHES: ECCLESIASTES 5:18-20

It is important to realize that the book of Ecclesiastes does not condemn the entire physical world. Rather, it condemns the misuse and abuse of the creation. Here, in verses 18-20, Solomon sets forth the right use of riches.

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes 5:18-20: 18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he takes under the sun all the days of his life, which God gives him: for it is his portion. 19 Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. 20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answers him in the joy of his heart.*

### COMMENTARY:

These reasons proving the unprofitableness of riches, are all illustrated by an appendix touching the right use of riches, inserted by Solomon to prevent doubts and vails which might be occasioned by the former discourse as if riches were of no use nor benefit at all. Wherefore, Solomon shows what is the true benefit and comfort that they can afford unto us. *Behold, that which I have seen*, the same that he set down before, *Chap. 2, verse 24*.

The right use of riches consists in two things: first, liberal use of the creatures for all necessities of food and raiment [clothing] *to eat and to drink*. Second, cheerfulness and contentation of spirits, *to enjoy good in his labor & c*.

Both uses are commended unto us from the excellency of this contented use of things: First, Solomon considers the things in themselves: they are good to man's self; comely, that is beautiful and seemly in regard of others; and, this is the only end and purpose for which riches are given, *it's his portion*, more than this, it is impossible to by them, *verse 18*.

Riches are shown from their true author: Riches are God's gift, not our own getting, who as he gives wealth, so gives power, i.e., wisdom and grace to use it well, *verse 19*.

Riches are good in their effect and consequent, namely, comfort, ease in all the travails, cares and burdens of this life. *He shall not much remember the days of his life, i.e.*, that sore condition of travail and wearisome labor which is laid on man during his life, shall not be very grievous unto him to think of or to endure: Some grief and burden it shall be (as no man can be perfectly happy) but not much: Why? The reason follows, *because God answers his honest labors and desires, in or with the joy of his heart*, giving him hearty joy and contentment in what he hath, which takes away the bitterness of labors past, and arms him against all the discouragements in travails yet to be endured, *verse 20*.

## HOW NOT TO USE RICHES: ECCLESIASTES 6:1-12

Riches, in and of themselves, can be a great curse: money can make things so bad that it would be better not to be born. Things, in and of themselves, can actually create an insatiable desire which will never be filled, thus rendering one unhappy in the extreme. Enjoyment is only a gift of God.

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes 6:1-12: 1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: 2 A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wants nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eats it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease. 3 If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. 4 For he comes in with vanity, and departs in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. 5 Moreover he has not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this has more rest than the other. 6 Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet has he seen no good: do not all go to one place?*

*7 All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. 8 For what has the wise more than the fool? what has the poor, that knows to walk before the living? 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit. 10 That which has been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he. 11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? 12 For who knows what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spends as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?*

### COMMENTARY:

From the vanity and misery of the contrary course, *viz.*, the having of riches but wanting the right use of them. This evil is generally propounded and aggravated by the commonness of it, *there is*, and it is common, rife, or great amongst men as common sins are great sins, *verse 1*.

The evil of the misuse of riches is particularly described in the person of such a man as hath riches and wealth, and that with honor and dignity, and all in such plenty as he can desire no more for necessity or lawful delight, but God gives him not power to eat thereof, *i.e.*, to enjoy what he hath: sickness of body, a distrustful uncharitableness and niggardly mind, incessant cares and toil after what he hath not, troubles and disquietness in his family, wife, or children & c. continual employment about others' business, with the like, keep him that he cannot eat his bread in quiet, nor take pleasure in anything he hath. He starves at a full table, and feeds on thistles while he carries provender for other, *a stranger shall eat it*, one that hath not taken pains shall

enjoy it, *verse 2*.

The evil of the misuse of riches is censured: Simply in itself, it's a vanity, and which is more, an evil sickness that puts a man to much pain and woe, *verse 2*. Comparatively, preferring the conditions of an untimely birth before such a man's estate. In the comparison consider:

The parties compared: The rich man before described, here further described by the good he has: a multitude of children; and length of days, and that more than ordinary. Good he wants [*lacks*]: Comfort and joy in his life. Honor and good report at his death.

The rich man is compared to an abortive or untimely birth, which Solomon prefers before the other, *viz*. It is better not to be born at all, or to be born and die at once, than to live long in misery and trouble, and to die without the honor of burial or without honorable burial.

The reason of the abortives preeminence above the rich man. If the abortive have more rest and peace than the miserable rich man, then is his case better than other. But he hath, for the abortive *cometh in vanity*, as a thing of nothing; *departs in darkness*, buried out of the way, privately, none taking notice of it; *and his name is covered with darkness*, all memory and speech of him perishes, *verse 4*. In which points the rich is no better than he, who likewise, is born to misery, buried in ignominy, and his name put out in forgetfulness; but in the next point he is far worse: The abortive *hath not seen the sun nor known*, *viz*, the evils and miserable troubles of this life, as the rich man hath, *Ergo*, it is worse with the rich than this untimely born child, *verse 5*.

### **Response to Objections:**

This argument is further confirmed by removing an objection, *viz*, the rich man had long life, and that is a good and pleasant thing: this the abortive hath not, *ergo*, Solomon answers:

First, while a man lives, life simply in itself brings a man no comfort, if all other joys be wanting: *Though he live two thousand years, yet he hath seen no good*, his years hath but multiplied his misery, and to him it was no good thing to live, seeing he lived unhappily.

Second, after a long and miserable life, he must come into the same condition as the abortive: *Do not all go into one place? viz*, the grave; in which he is not a jot better than the abortive, because he came later into it; but much worse, for as much as he hath got nothing by many years experience of evils, in regard whereof he can be accounted no more happy in his grave than the abortive, *verse 8*.

Third, this condition of the unhappy richmen, as it seems to illustrate the point touching the right use of riches, so shall it stand for an argument proving the vanity of riches, *viz*, that a man may have them in his possession, and yet want all comfort in the enjoying of them, which argue their singular weakness and insufficiency, & c.

Fourth, an argument from the insufficiency of riches to give satisfaction to man's desires. Contentment is not contentment unless it be full and satisfactory: which riches cannot afford as Solomon proves by the utmost extent whereto riches can reach, and that is the mouth: *All the labor of a man is for his mouth, i.e.*, the body and all the services thereof, and this they may satisfy, further they extend not: *yet the soul is not filled*, the appetite or desire of the mind is still insatiable.

The glutton's belly may burst before his inordinate and swinish appetite be stanch'd. The covetous, the more he hath, the more he desires. The ambitious is not content with the honor of an universal monarchy. The voluptuous may weary their bodies and full their senses, yet not

quench their thirst for pleasures: wherefore, this is a great vanity in worldly wealth, that it can give content only to the carcass and worse part of a man, but to his inward and more noble spirit it brings no satisfaction at all, *verse 7*.

***An Illustration:***

That this is all which riches can do, Solomon proves by induction of two pair of opposites, the wise and the fool – the rich and the poor. If riches and abundance had any special virtue to content the mind of man, than of all others wise men and rich men would enjoy this happiness. But they find no more happiness by them than fools or poor men do, and therefore, there is no more to be looked for. *What has the wise man more than the fool?* Let a man have wealth and all moral wisdom to manage it, he can but provide for back and belly, and so much may he do that hath as much and less wit and discretion. *What has the poor,* that wants wealth, less than the rich that has it, if he be one *that knows to walk before the living*, that is, wise, painful and laborious, that knows how to get his living; such a one has as much profit by his little, as the rich has by his abundance, he has wherewithal to preserve life, and the rich can do no more, *verse 8*.

From whence by way of consecretary [OED \*\*\*] Solomon infers an answer to a common objection: *Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire:* better it is to have and enjoy abundance, and to have store lying by one, than still to crave, wish, desire, and long after many things, to which Solomon answers: First, that this is vanity; an empty conceit and hope, seeing the having of much is not that which can settle and fill the desire of the soul. Secondly, that it is vexation, abundance of riches bringing abundance of cares, disquieting the heart instead of contenting it, *verse 9*.

**An Argument From the Weakness of Riches:**

Argument from the weakness and invalidity of riches to protect us against those evils whereunto mankind is subject, as sickness, grief of heart, sin, and the wrath of God for the punishment of sin. *That which has been named already, and it is known that it is man,* a man is but a man be he never so great in worldly wealth, that cannot exempt him from the common condition of others; as he bears the name, so he hath the nature of man still: *Nor can he contend with him that is mightier than he,* that is, with God; the strokes of whose revenging hand he cannot escape, how rich, proud, and presumptuous so ever he be, *verse 10*.

**An Argument from the Common Effect:**

Argument from the common effect, or at least concomitant of great abundance. If increase of riches be but an increase of vanity, troubles, distractions, cares to keep and use, fears to lose, what benefit then towards true happiness doth a man get by them? But many things, or a multitude of things do but multiply vanity, *ergo, What is man the better for them? Verse 11.*

This argument is confirmed by reason drawn from the weakness and ignorance of man, to

make the best use of things<sup>49</sup>: a little is enough to employ us, many and great things do but distract us; and we shall miss of their true comfort, because we are ignorant of the true ways to raise them, *for who knows what is good for man in this life?* Two reasons of this unskilfulness of man, in the usage of the things are here added,

First, from the shortness of man's life, we live not long enough to have experience of all things, where, and when, and in what manner they may be best employed, *all the days of his vain life which he spends as a shadow*; vain because changeable, fleeting, and quickly spent, as a shadow, a thing of no continuance.

Second, from our ignorance of future events, we know not how matters will fall out, and so are uncertain what course to take. Hence, many errors and oversights might have been taken. *For who can tell man what shall be after him under the Sun?*<sup>50</sup> Which shall succeed most happily, this or that, verse 12.

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<sup>49</sup> For it is not in the nature of riches themselves to trouble, but our indiscretion in use of them.

<sup>50</sup> If he knew what would be cheap or dear, he might be rich within a year.

## **PART TWO: WHAT WILL PROVIDE A MAN TRUE HAPPINESS? CHAPTERS 7-12**

(Introduction by Pemble) Hitherto Solomon has described man's chief happiness by way of negation, showing wherein it consists not, and overthrowing all false means for the obtaining of it: he comes now to the second part of the book, to declare affirmatively and positively wherein man's blessedness stands, and whereby it is obtained. This he does:

1. Particularly in the several degrees and means of true happiness, so far as in this life we may attain unto it, in the 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and part of the 12 chapter.
2. Summarily in the conclusion of the discourse, chapter 12, verse 8.

### **FIVE MEANS TO TRUE HAPPINESS: ECCLESIASTES 7:1-12:7**

Beginning in chapter 7, Solomon sets down five elements of any true happiness: A good name, death, sorrow, moderation, wisdom. The discussion of wisdom will begin in 7:10 and continues through 12:7. Solomon will discuss wisdom from several aspects throughout this section.

## **THE FIRST ELEMENT OF HAPPINESS: A GOOD NAME: ECCLESIASTES 7:1**

This verse is a key to interpreting the entire book. It is interesting that a book by Solomon specifically does not include Solomon's name. By the time of his "recantation and repentance", Solomon had anything but a "good name". Thus, Solomon could affirm definitively that a necessary aspect of happiness is the "good name" which he no longer possessed.

### **TEXT:**

*Ecclesiastes 7:1a: A good name is better than precious ointment . . . .*

### **COMMENTARY:**

*A good name*, preferred before riches and pleasures, viz., *a good ointment*<sup>51</sup>, which is esteemed among chiefest treasure for its costliness, and best delights for its savor and sweet smell, and refreshing to the body.

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<sup>51</sup> Prov. 11. 1; Isa. 39.2.

## THE SECOND AND THIRD ELEMENTS OF HAPPINESS: DEATH AND SORROW: ECCLESIASTES 7:1b-4

Sorrow and death as an element of true happiness may seem counter-intuitive. Yet, the understanding of trials as good to a Christian was not an uncommon understanding among Puritan divines. The following quotation from Richard Sibbes' *A Bruised Reed* may provide some help to understand this element of happiness:

*Hence we learn that we must not pass too harsh judgment upon ourselves or others when God exercises us with bruising upon bruising. There must be a conformity to our head, Christ, who `was bruised for us' (Isa. 53:5) that we may know how much we are bound unto him. Ungodly spirits, ignorant of God's ways in bringing his children to heaven, censure broken hearted Christians as miserable persons, whereas God is doing a gracious, good work with them. It is no easy matter to bring a man from nature to grace, and from grace to glory, so unyielding and intractable are our hearts.*

### TEXT:

*ECCLESIASTES 7:1-5: 1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. 2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. 5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.*

### COMMENTARY:

*Benefits of Death and Sorrow*<sup>52</sup>:

*Death*, preferred above the day of a man's birth, viz., life, and all the commodities thereof, which is to be understood of life, as it is accompanied with many miseries and vexations, whereunto death puts an end, otherwise it is worse to have no being than to be well, *verse 1*.

*Sorrow and sadness of heart*, preferred to mirth and pleasure: This is axomatically delivered, *verse 3*, *Sorrow is better than laughter*: Of godly sorrow, that is better than worldly

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<sup>52</sup> Note that death and sorrow are connected by proximity to a "good name". Scripture proves and experience demonstrates that times of ease often lead to sin, while times of difficulty have provoked many to holiness. In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is safe while he goes up the Hill of Difficulty on his knees. It is when he rests in the arbor that Christian falls into sin. David's virtue was certain while he was being chased by Saul. It was when David was safe and at ease in Jerusalem that he sinned in the matter of Uriah's wife. *Ed.*

joy, is most true and here meant in part. But even worldly sorrow, also, if it go not too far as to breed consuming grief, which eat[s] up the heart, it is to be commended above continual jollity and merriment.

*Proof of the Point that Sorrow and Death Produce Benefits:*

This is exemplified and proved in two sorts of sadness following men's death, *the house of mourning*, where opposite banquetings and merry-meetings made usually at men's birth, or otherwise by those that abound in wealth, *the house of feasting*: The first causes sorrow, the latter joy, but yet it is better to resort thither than hither.

The first proof of this point is drawn from the effects of this sorrow and joy, *ex anthesis*, *i.e.*, which here are two: The first antithetical product of sorrow is shown in the special in respect of the cause: funerals, graves, mourners, & c., breed in us a serious mediation of our mortal condition: *The living lay it to his heart*, advisedly consider of it, why? *For it is the end of all men*. He sees in others what must go the same way. This singular provocation to goodness and sobriety is not to be had in feasts and banquets, which usually make us forget both God and ourselves, *verse 2*.

The second antithetical product of sorrow is shown in general at all times, *By the sadness of the countenance*, by sorrow appearing in the face, *the heart is bettered*. All light, vain, lustful and foolish affections are checked, the desires and thoughts of the mind composed to a sad and sober temper, and made capable of all instruction and reprehension, & c. A sad look shewes and makes a sober mind; and that not only in regard of ourselves, but of others also, a severe, angry, and frowning countenance daunts and adulterous eye, a flattering tongue & c., and they are made better by it, *verse 3*.

The second proof that sorrow produces benefits is shown from the contrary to be understood of laughter, which dissolves the heart, and melts it into looseness and lewdness.

From the persons that delight in them, *the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning*. A wise man's mind and affections are bent to sadness and sobriety, and make choice to be in such company as may bring him to it: *The heart of fools is in the house of feasting*. His desires are carried after unseasonable mirth and jollity, company keeping, and good fellowship, & c. Mirth and sadness shew who is wise, who is foolish; who good, who bad, & c. *verse 4*.

*The Benefits of Reproof*

Reproof, which causeth grief for the present and flattery which breeds some kind of joy. *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise*: The just reprehension seasonably given by a wise and godly man; *than to hear the song of fools*, to be flattered by ungodly claw-backs, whose speeches are as a *song* and sweet music – very pleasing to a carnal and corrupt mind, *verse 5*. That it is better to be sharply reprov'd, than smoothly soothed, Solomon proves by the different effects of both:

Flattery gives much contentment for the time, warms the heart with much joy in the conceit and admiration of itself, but it soon vanisheth and the grief of a bad conscience comes in its stead.

Reprehension is greivous for the time, but after it breeds the true fruit of righteousness, peace and perpetual comfort. This is understood by the antithesis, the former only expressed under a simile of thorns or brush wood under a pot, that crackle much, burn suddenly and brightly, heart vehemently for the present, but the flame scorcheth only the outside a little, and is quicly extinct: *So is the laughter of fools*, of wicked men that please others with their sins and flatteries, lewd jests, and filthy discourses; of wicked men that will be pleased and joyed in such things. He that makes this mirth and he that likes it, both are fools, and their pleasantness will soon have an end: So that such kind of delights is but vanity, *verse 6*.

## THE THIRD ELEMENT OF TRUE HAPPINESS: MODERATION: ECCLESIASTES 7:7-9

Moderation and patience are the means by which a man properly seeks happiness in this world. Here, Pemble is in particular commending a realistic view to life and understanding that we must live in the world as it actually is.

A great deal of suffering in this life takes place because our expectations do not match reality. To bridge the difference between expectation and reality we are tempted to and do sin. See, e.g., James 4:1-3. As Jeremiah Burroughs aptly noted, the best way to obtain contentment is to bring our expectations into conformity with the reality which God has providentially arranged.

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes 7:7-9: 7 Surely oppression makes a wise man mad; and a gift destroys the heart. 8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. 9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger rests in the bosom of fools. 10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.*

### COMMENTARY:

*Moderation of mind and patience, opposed and preferred to proud and oppressing greatness.*

First, Solomon speaks of the fault of great ones: (a) oppression; (b) bribery, *a gift*. Both set down with their effects, that *makes a wise man mad*; this *destroys the heart*. If a wise and good man turn oppressor and briber<sup>53</sup>, he becomes foolish and mad, raging like a wild and furious beast over his poor inferiors, the eye of his understanding and counsel is put out, his conscience wracked, he calls good evil and sour sweet; like a frantic man run the highway to ruin himself and his posterity by his unjust courses, thinking yet thereby to establish himself and his house, *verse 7*.

Second, Solomon speaks of the remedy for this fault: Moderation, and patience in not desiring more than is fit and equal, in enduring what is wrongful and unequal, that respects all, especially great men, this those that are wronged. This virtue is set down with comparison to the opposite, *better* and more to be commended is the humble, *ex antithesis*, and *patience in spirit than the proud and impatient in spirit*.

*The Definition of Patience:*

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<sup>53</sup> The references in Ecclesiastes to oppression have been held to be inconsistent with Solomon's reign (if he is so against oppression, surely he could have done something about it). Yet here, a wise man is said to become "mad" by engaging in oppression: "For oppression makes a wise man mad". That is the way of much sin, he changes the person who practices the sin. *Ed.*

A silent waiting upon God and good means, expecting God's time and leisure for the obtaining of such good things, wealth, honors, & c., as we may and do with to enjoy, opposed to that kind of impatience to have more and otherwise than we should. A singular virtue in all, to expect till God by due means in due time advance us; and that which curbs tyrannical and unjust desires.

A contented bearing and enduring of such injuries as are done unto us, opposite to wrathful contention, revengeful desires, mourning, & c. Another kind of impatience, an excellent grace in men of meaner place, in case of wrong from their superiors. Both these have their root in true humility, when men esteeming meanly of themselves, judge that in good things they have more, in evil less than they deserve: which makes them desire little and endure much: as the contrary springs from pride, when out of a high account of their own worth and power, men think they need do no right nor ought to suffer any wrong, *verse 8*.

*Proof of the Point:*

The virtue of this moderation is further pressed on us by an argument of its necessity, proverbially delivered, *The end of a thing is better than its beginning*<sup>54</sup>. Many casualties [events] may fall out, things may sort to no ends, to wrong ends, to ill & hurtfull ends, *ergo*, it is good to be patient & wait the issue [outcome]. An excellent argument to keep men from injustice and oppression, if they would look as well to the gravel and gall in the belly, as the bread and honey in the mouth. And as strange a motive it is to keep us patient under injuries, if we look what end the Lord will make us, *verse 8*.

Solomon also proves the point by means of a dehortation from two particulars of the contrary vice of impatience: rash anger, when men being stung by some injury, break out in fury and meditate on revenge, *be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry*, be angry, but not hastily nor rashly: And that in thy spirit, giving way to revengefull and malicious thoughts; the reason is added, *anger rests in the bosom of fools*, anger if it rest, rests nowhere but in a wicked man's heart, *verse 9*.

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<sup>54</sup> Such an argument the Apostle [????], Phil. 4.5.

## THE FIFTH ELEMENT OF TRUE HAPPINESS: WISDOM: ECCLESIASTES 7:10-12:7

The discussion of wisdom forms the single greatest division in the book and in the commentary. Wisdom is considered from several different angles, each of which contribute its own part to one's overall understanding. For purposes of clarity, each of these elements will be considered severally.

### A GENERAL STATEMENT OF VALUE OF WISDOM: ECCLESIASTES 7:11-12

Before Solomon launches into an extended discussion of the nature of wisdom, he provides a short statement concerning the value of wisdom.

#### TEXT:

*Eccl. 7: 11-12: 11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. 12 For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom gives life to them that have it.*

#### COMMENTARY:

*Wisdom*, that is, true piety as the root and mistress, with civil prudence as the branch and handmaid. This wisdom being the principal fountain of all our felicity, is described unto us at large unto the end of the book.

In comparison and opposition to riches, before which it is preferred, *wisdom is good with an inheritance*, why and is it not good without it? Yes, no doubt: the meaning is, that it is good for them that have inheritance, *i.e.*, wealth and possessions to get wisdom withall; without which their wealth is not good. Both together are good, but wisdom the better of the twain.<sup>55</sup> *And better* more excellent to them that see the sun, to the living. Or, *or by it there is profit to*, *viz*, wealth then only doth a man good when this wisdom is joined with it, *verse 11*. The reason of the excellency of wisdom above wealth, is taken from the use and effect of both, in case of adversity, necessity, and trouble, here compared to the scorching heat of the sun, which in hotter countries is very troublesome. Against these troubles we have a double help: First, from wisdom; secondly, from riches, *money*, the succour and defence which both yield, being likened to the shadow of an arbour & c., which keeps off the sun's beams. So that both in their kind afford us comfort. *But the excellency is on the side of knowledge*<sup>56</sup> that doth us most good when we stand in most need, for *wisdom gives life to them that are masters or owners of it*, in deadly

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<sup>55</sup> Wisdom shows the use of wealth, and this graces wisdom.

<sup>56</sup> Jer. 41.8,9. Abigal's danger. 1 Sam. 25. Joseph.

dangers that assault us, it rescues us when money and means fail<sup>57</sup> or, if evils press us, it preserves the heart in peace and comfort, that it sinks not under them, which money cannot do; or if the worse come, yet this saves from eternal death, the worst evil, and brings no eternal life, the best good thing. And a world of wealth can help neither out of the one, nor unto the other, *verse 12.*

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<sup>57</sup> Prov. 10.12 & 16.16, 17.

## THE FIVE GENERAL ASPECTS OF WISDOM

Pemble finds five general aspects to wisdom set forth in Ecclesiastes<sup>58</sup>: (1) contentment, (2) resolution & consistency, (3) charity & meekness, (4) the difficulty of attaining to wisdom, (5) the wise ordering of life. Elements 1-4 are addressed in chapter 7 of Ecclesiastes. Element 5, the wise ordering of life, is addressed in chapters 8 - 12.

### ***THE FIRST ELEMENT OF WISDOM: CONTENTMENT: ECCLESIASTES 7:13-14:***

#### **TEXT:**

*Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*  
(Ecclesiastes 7:13-14, KJV)

#### **COMMENTARY:**

*Contentation* in the right use of estate and conditions of life, chiefly prosperity and adversity: in which point we have

First, The duty, *In the day (or time short as a day) of prosperity be joyfull*<sup>59</sup>, enjoy thy portion of blessings with cheerfulness. *In the day of adversity consider*, be well advised, fall not to impatient murmuring, or ungodly shifting, but stay thyself in expectation of God, *verse 14*.

Second, The arguments enforcing it, taken from God's providence in a double respect:

The unalterableness of his work: We cannot at our pleasures change and undo what God does: *Ergo*, be content in all estates. *Consider the work of God*, meditate on his provident administration of all things, *who can make straight*, none can alter and amend what to us seems amiss, *verse 13*.

The inevitableness of God's purposes, they are carried with such variety and unsearchable proceedings, that we cannot prevent nor foresee them: *Ergo*, it is wisdom to submit ourselves to all. *God sets the one over against the other*, adversity opposite prosperity, a vale against a hill, in a continual vicissitude and succession; and this is done *to the end* or in such an order and manner *that man should*, or shall *find nothing after him*, of those things that may come upon him in the course of his life and after times, he cannot be wit foresee, nor by policy prevent ensuing changes; and therefore it is a great part of his wisdom to arm himself with patience for all adventures, *verse 14*.

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<sup>58</sup> Pemble writes, "By its parts, properties, and effects, all setting forth the use and excellency of true wisdom: These are diverse, some more general, other more particular, for the general they are five, whereof the fifth have divers branches as we shall see".

<sup>59</sup> Good & mercy, both together.

**THE SECOND ELEMENT OF WISDOM: RESOLUTION AND CONSTANCY:  
ECCLESIASTES 7:17-19**

**TEXT:**

*Ecclesiastes 7:17-19: 17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time? 18 It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. 19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.*

**COMMENTARY:**

**Resolution and constancy** in goodness, notwithstanding the hard measure, unrighteousness and unequal dealing, which for goodness sake may befall both us and others. In this effect of true wisdom we have set down unto us:

***The temptation,***

*There is a just man, both civilly just and religiously holy, that perisheth* is oppressed, down, and brought untimely to his end, *in his righteousness*, being innocent and guiltless, or, for his righteousness, because he is a good man. The different event to the bad follos, *and there is a wicked man*, that hath neither honesty nor godliness, *that prolongeth his life in his wickedness*, lives long in his sin with impunity, credit and countenance, and that haply because he is wicked: These unlike and unequal proceedings Solomon sets down as no rare and unusual accidents, but as common events which fall out in every man's age: and which himself among other observations had seen in his vain and short life, *All things I have seen, & c., verse 15.*

***The issue and conclusion thence arising***<sup>60</sup>; which is double:

First, according to nature and the judgment of carnal and corrupt reason, which hence draws conclusions tending to an indifferency in good courses, and politic forbearance of forwardness in piety. *Be not righteous overmuch*, seeing righteous men fare so ill, take heed of being too good and too forward: not that a man can indeed be so, but such is the judgment of carnal policy, that our very duty is but overmuch and less preciseness, *nor make thyself over wise*, leave off this affected humor, since so men esteem the study of piety and virtue, be not more nice and wise than other men, be discreet and wary, and stand not strictly upon terms of conscience and religion, but remit a little if danger be coming towards thee: the reason of this counsel is taken from the event, *Why should thou destroy thyself?* To what end should thou bring thyself in danger of envy, vexation, & c. to make thyself a prey, & c. *Verse 16.*

Second, according to grace and the judgment of the spirit, maintaining in us a resolved &

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<sup>60</sup> That is, since the wicked at times prosper and the "righteous" perish, what should we think and do about the world? *Ed.*

zealous constancy in goodness notwithstanding such events. Which resolution is declared in opposite terms to the counsel of the flesh: Be not just overmuch, says the flesh, Nay, rather says the Spirit, *be not wicked overmuch*, viz., he that slacks and abates in goodness and qualifies it, though but with a little degree of badness, as the flesh imagineth to do, he is bad, and too bad. *Be not overwise*, says the flesh. Nay says the Spirit, *be not foolish* as all are that temper spiritual wisdom with carnal policy. There is danger in being too good, says the flesh; much more in being too bad, says the Spirit: We are apter to fall into this extreme than to hold a mean in the other, and from this extreme, greater hurt will accrue unto us than can from the other, viz., Death, the greatest of evils, *why should thou die?* Sin brings death, and the worst of deaths, *not in thy time?* An untimely and unseasonable death, when it were better for thee to do anything than to die, and an eternal death, *verse 17*.

This resolution (a zealous constancy in goodness notwithstanding such events<sup>61</sup>) is urged on us by an earnest exhortation, *It is good* (whatsoever evil befall) *that thou lay hold on this* on constancy in thy integrity and uprightness; and having taken hold *that thou withdraw not thy hand from this*, lose not thy handfast nor fall off from thy sincerity, but cleave unto it still, *verse 18*. The exhortation is backed with a reason from the promise of God to the faithful, *for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all*. The godly shall have comfort in, and a happy issue out of all adversity, *verse 18*.

### ***An Illustration***

This is illustrated by a prolepsis<sup>62</sup>: Weakness and infidelity will plead: Objection. I want [lack] friends and means to work my safety and freedom from troubles. *Ergo*, I am likely to bide by the worst.

Solomon, By comparison of wisdom and worldly helps: *Wisdom strengtheth the wise man more than ten mighty men which are in the city*<sup>63</sup>. The prudent, godly man who has God for his friend, is better defended and aided, than he that has the favor or assistance of many potentates and princes in a commonwealth, *verse 19*.

### ***THE THIRD ASPECT OF TRUE WISDOM: CHARITY & MEEKNESS: ECCLESIASTES 7:20-22***

The person who meekly and charitably bears with the faults of others – even if that fault is something as extreme as speaking ill – is a great means to obtain happiness. Since, thoughts of

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas Watson's, *The Great Gain of Godliness* (Banner of Truth, 2006), gives a lengthy encouragement to "Hold Fast in Evil Days", i.e., be godly despite the tenor of the world around. *Ed.*

<sup>62</sup> A prolepsis is a response to an anticipated objection. *Ed.*

<sup>63</sup>Jeremiah's afflictions and escapes.

revenge will only cause one to be upset. You can't be happy and rage with hate at the same time.

**TEXT:**

*Ecclesiastes 7:20-22: 20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not. 21 Also takes no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: 22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knows that thou thyself likewise has cursed others.*

**COMMENTARY:**

*Charity and meekness* towards others, in bearing and passing by man's infirmities and injuries in and from them opposed to a suspicious, censorious, revengefull and implacable mind. This most excellent part of true wisdom (whose virtue and use is of large extent in all conversations and society) is set forth by synecdoche<sup>64</sup>. 1. In one kind of fault which is most apt & usual to breed offence, *viz*, evil speeches. 2. In one kind of men, which are the fittest objects on whom men think they may best discharge their choler.

Servants and inferiors: Touching these we are commanded, *Take no heed to all the worlds that are spoken*, take not to heart all offensive speeches that are uttered in heat and passion, in jest or in earnest; think not too much on them, hear and hear not; hear, but dissemble and pass by in love, without bitterness, wrath and displeasure: This do as in regard of others, equals or superiors, so even of the servant *whom thou should not hear* in severe examination and animadversion for every speech or not *cursing thee* in greater contumelies, bitter complaints and execrations, *verse 21*. Now this meek and merciful bearing with others' faults, is commended unto us by a double argument:

- (A) From the common condition of human frailty; in many things we sin all, even the best, *For there is not a just man*, no, be he never so just *upon earth*, in all the world, *that doth good, viz.*, only *and sinneth not*. Wherefore, in scanning of others faults, we must consider ourselves, lest we likewise be tempted, *verse 20*.
- (B) From the conscience of a man's own failings and infirmities in the same kind haply for which he now condemneth others. *For oftentimes thine own heart knoweth not that thou hast cursed others*, spoken ill, reviled, railed & c. upon others, for which notwithstanding thou wouldest have them pardon thee, and use the favorably; do so likewise thyself to others. *Hanc veniam petimusque damnique vicissim, & c.*, *verse 21*.

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<sup>64</sup> Here a synecdoche is a part given as an illustration for the whole. For example, when there is a call for "all hands on deck", we hope not merely to see the hands but rather the entire body of the sailor. However, the "hand" being the working part is emphasized and the part stands for the whole.

***THE FOURTH ASPECT OF TRUE WISDOM: DIFFICULTY OF ATTAINING WISDOM: ECCLESIASTES 7:23-29***

For wisdom to help with happiness, it must first be acquired. We must plainly understand this difficulty if it is to be overcome. Solomon sets forth the nature of the difficulty in acquiring wisdom in this passage.

**TEXT:**

*23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. 24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? 25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness: 26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. 27 Behold, this have I found, says the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account: 28 Which yet my soul seeks, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. 29 Lo, this only have I found, that God has made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

**COMMENTARY:**

*The difficulty* to attain to this wisdom, which properly as it commends wisdom by its rarity, so it pulls down man's pride and checks his curiosity. This difficulty is demonstrated unto us two ways:

First, by Solomon's experience in his own study and search after it: *All this have I proved, viz.,* I have attained to great experience and that by more than ordinary helps, so that *I said* and thought no less with myself, *I shall be wise* and know all things, but all things reckoned up, I see *it is far from me, viz.,* perfection thereof. And if it were far from Solomon, what other man shall come near it, *verse 23.*

Second, the difficulty to obtain wisdom is shown from the nature of those things which are to be known to make a man wise: These things are expressed:

Generally, all things are full of darkness and obscurity: by similitude of things far distant from us, or deeply hid in the bowels of the earth, both which are hard and almost impossible to be exactly searched out and known by us. *That which is far off & c., who can find out?* Yea, though he have more wisdom than Solomon had, *verse 24.*

In particular, there are two things which make it difficult to acquire wisdom. The first is the difficulty in learning of all sorts in the several arts and mysteries thereof: Here called *wisdom* which is interpreted in the next word, *the reason of all things* so far as by discourse they may be found out.

Wisdom is difficult to acquire due to the corruption and guilefulness of man's heart: a special inquiry of singular use for the advancement of true wisdom: *And to know the wickedness*

*of folly, or the wicked folly of men, even of foolishness and madness so is the sinfulness, deceitfulness and corruption of a wicked man styled, who is beside his wits foolish and mad, verse 25.*

### ***The Conclusions of His Research***

Touching both these Solomon declares unto what was his inquiry and search: This he understood, notwithstanding the difficulty aforesaid, with great diligence and pains expressed in many words, *I applied mine heart with much attention to know and to search and to seek, verse 25.*

The issue of his study, what he found out; expressed only in the latter part concerning man's wickedness (of the former he had spoken, chapter 1) which in brief he finds to be infinite and beyond man's comprehension:

#### *The Example of the Harlot*

His conclusion is declared [proved] by instance and induction:

Of one sex, viz, the weaker and in it, of its worst kind, the Harlot, whose infinite subtleties and wily wickedness is described by her parts, her: (1) Wiliness to catch: *Her heart is as snares & nets* full of cunning, fetches, plots, devices, and polices to entangle mens' affections, as fishers, & c. (2) Power to keep, *her hands as bands*, her embraces, kisses, looks & c., are as cords wherewith she binds fast the loving beast to be always at her command, *verse 26.*

Aggravated by many arguments:

First, by comparison with death: *I find more than death the woman*, the wickedness of a harlot causes a lingering consumption of the body, name, estate: and after brings to eternal death, *verse 26.*

Second, from the power and force of her temptations which are so enticing as nothing but supernatural helps, grace and God's love can preserve us from them: A sinner left to himself cannot but fall into her snare, *who so pleaseth God shall escape but the sinner, & c., verse 26.*

Third, from Solomon's earnest study to find out the depth of a woman's beguiling heart, the exact knowledge whereof he could not attain, *Behold this I have found, viz, so much is mentioned, verse 26. Says the Preacher, who was able to discern fruther than other, coming one by one* trying and examining the disposition & nature of many *to find out the accounts*, the perfect knowledge of this point, *which yet my soul and desire seek after, but I find it not*, not attain unto it, *verse 27, 28.*

Fourth, by comparison with men, amongst whom there might be found one of a thousand whose politic, devices, fraud & falsehood might be discovered; but not one woman among a thousand could be found, the depth of whose devilish deceit could be measured, *one man & c. but a woman among those*, haply those thousand wives and concubines which he had whereof, it seems there were few good, *verse 28.*

#### *The Instance of All Human Beings*

Of both sexes, man and woman, *viz.*, that neither of them are as God has made them, but both have strangely gone awry from that straightness of their creation. *Lo, this only I have found, God made man upright and straight, but they, both Adam and Eve and also their posterity, have found out of their own accord many inventions, many crooked counsels and devices for the practicing, defending, excusing & c., of their evil courses. The shifts are many so that it is hard to find them out: which must needs argue that true wisdom is difficult to be had, which consists in the knowledge of ourselves and others, that is hard to come by, this far more, verse 29.*

***THE FIFTH ASPECT OF TRUE WISDOM: THE WISE ORDERING OF ONE'S AFFAIRS: ECCLESIASTES 8:1-9:17***

Having made the general points concerning his investigation, Solomon proceeds to an analysis of practical wisdom, that is, wisdom in practice. Verse 8.1 serves an introduction to this section. In the passage from 8:2-9:17 examines five separate aspects of practical wisdom. Thus, this entire section may be seen as a series of six points:

1. Introduction: 8:1
2. Obedience to the king: 8:2-8:5.
3. Preparation for evils: 8:6-8.
4. A right understanding of the wicked man's property: 8:9-13.
5. Understanding "chance" events: Part I, 8:14-17; Part II, 9:1-12.
6. The right consideration of disgrace and contempt: 9:13-17.

**INTRODUCTION TO THE MATTER OF WISE ORDERING OF ONE'S AFFAIRS:  
ECCLESIASTES 8:1**

Wisdom is here commended as that thing which gives us credit and esteem with our fellows and which give us true confidence and boldness. Wisdom is thus at the heart of any wise ordering of one's life.

**TEXT:**

*Ecclesiastes 8:1: Who is as the wise man? and who knows the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom makes his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.*

**COMMENTARY:**

The fifth part or branch of true wisdom, direction and perfection of right judgment in the wise ordering of himself and affairs. This virtue is

Summarily expressed and commended. First, in the nature of it, *Who is as a wise man?* None to be compared to a wise man: And who is he? The next words expound wherein this wisdom is, *who (viz., the wise man) knows the interpretation of a thing?* Who can discern and truly judge of all affairs and their nature and circumstances, what must be done, what avoided. This to know oneself, and interpret unto others, is a point of that wisdom which makes us happy.

Secondly, in the effect of it, which are two:

(1) Credit and esteem, *a man's wisdom makes his face shine*, this is a metaphor which means: brings his person in admiration, makes him lovely<sup>65</sup>, beautiful, and amiable or venerable, awful, and reverend as *Moses, Steven*, or, (*sed q.*) cheerful, without frowning sullenness.

(2) True confidence and security, *the boldness of his countenance shall be changed*, from impudent and presumptuous overbearing and fool-hardiness to true confidence and resolution, or *shall be doubled*, made very firm and assured. He that walks wisely hath a truly secure heart and bold face; he discovers no fears, because he foresees and prepares for evils; not yet shame, he commits no fault whereat he should blush, & c., *verse 1.*

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<sup>65</sup> Kiss the lips of him that speaks, & c.

## **FIRST PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE WISE ORDERING OF ONE'S LIFE: OBEDIENCE TO THE KING:**

Here begins a series of five examinations of wisdom in practice. Solomon begins with the practical problem of dealing with the king. Here is a point at which Pemble may have a distinct advantage over a modern reader of the text. Pemble lived in a world in which kings were very serious business. For a modern, Kings are an abstraction. An American may learn of King George's blunders and an English citizen may think of royalty as a quaint practice, but neither fears that Elizabeth or her son Charles are going to send anyone off to lose their head. As for elected politicians, we simply vote against them at our next chance. We think of politicians as "public servants".

Pemble's commentary takes very seriously the position of Solomonic authorship and the affect that has upon his view of the world, particularly in the matter of kingship.

Pemble introduces this section as follows: " The nature of the wise ordering of one's life is particularly exemplified in many points requiring great wisdom to free us from the danger of divers temptations which drive foolish men to foul extremities and inconveniences."

### **TEXT:**

"I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. (Ecclesiastes 8:2-5, KJV)

### **COMMENTARY:**

The first particular is the matter of obedience to kings in the execution of their commands, wherein a wise man carries his business faithfully and seasonably. Here note.

The duty: obedience to kings, *I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment*; the reason is added, *and that in regard of the oath of God*, because thou hast sworn allegiance to him, of which oath God is a witness and revenger. Which also may be in some part as a reason so a qualification of our obedience, *salvo juramento Dei*, so far as may stand with the fealty we owe to God, *verse 2*.

#### *A Dehortation to Disobedience*

The disobedience of foolish men, from which we are dehorted<sup>66</sup> [dehort: an exhortation designed to dissuade]. The fault is double:

The first fault in such disobedience is hastiness in taking offence at kings'

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<sup>66</sup> Nehemiah 10.29. Et in sacramento baptis.

commandments; expressed in it effect or sign, *viz*, departing out of his presence: to turn the back and fling away in a chase is a sign of rashness and fury, and also of contempt, especially before kings: *Be not hasty to go out, & c.*, take heed of conceiving and discovering discontent and choler before a king<sup>67</sup>.

The second fault of such disobedience is wishfulness in persisting in disobedience and rebellion, worse than the former, *Stand not in an evil thing*, submit and come in again, *verse 3*.

### *The Danger of Disobedience*

From these faults men are deterred by a two fold-argument.

From the danger of disobedience: It is not safe to oppose a king, because it is not easy to overmaster him: And therefore, he that resists and incurs his displeasure is sure to smart for it. The king's power is of large extent, *he doth what pleases him*, he will have his pleasure performed, either by obeying, or upon punishing thy rebellion, *verse 3*.

The reasons are: His words and commands are always joined with power, authority, and majesty, and therefore will oversway all power opposed to it, *where the word*<sup>68</sup>. His actions may not be censured and scanned by his subjects, *who may say unto him what does thou?* His faults are liable to God's, not man's, judgment, so that it is not in the subjects' power, nor belongs to their duty, to call him to examination, *verse 3*.

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<sup>67</sup> Jonah 1.3.

<sup>68</sup> The name of a king daunts rebels everywhere in all part of his dominion. nor hiding. How shall say, & c., Rom. 13.3.

## THE SECOND PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE WISE ORDERING OF LIFE: PREPARATION FOR EVILS: ECCLESIASTES 8:6-8

Solomon proceeds from the problem of danger which arises from a (capricious) king to the danger which flows from an apparently capricious or powerful world. If we are going to survive in such a place, we need to plan for the evil which will inevitably take place in a fallen, cursed world. In these verses, Solomon gives a series of three illustrations to demonstrate his point.

### TEXT:

*Ecclesiastes: 8:6-8: Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.*

### COMMENTARY

Heedful prevention and preparation for evils which may come upon us, we know not when nor how soon<sup>69</sup>. This fruit of wisdom is illustrated:

#### *First Illustration*

By the common misery of man that lies upon him by reason of his ignorance of things present, and to come: which plunges him into many errors and dangers. *The misery of man is great upon him.* Why? *Because there is a time and judgment for all things*, which for the most part men are ignorant of; *for he knows not that which shall be*, he is ignorant of himself, and has none that can instruct him, *for who can tell him when it shall be?* Verses 6, 7.

#### *Second Illustration*

By instance of man's weakness to help himself in the greatest of dangers, *viz.* Death, against which wisdom affords us resultion and patience, other help there is not: *No man hath power over the restrain the spirit*, none hath command of his own life, to live and die when he lists [desires] *Neither had he power in the day of death, viz.,* to save himself alive, *neither is there discharge in the war*<sup>70</sup>, *viz.* with death, against which there is no protection, no shifting, or, *nor is there deliverance in battle, viz.,* by a man's own strength or policy, *verse 8.*

#### *Third Illustration*

By the opposite of man's wickedness in devising and using ungodly means and unlawful

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<sup>69</sup> Doeg's obedience, and that of Saul's servants. 1 Sam. 22; 1 Chron. 31.3; 2 Sam. 19.5,6.

<sup>70</sup> Or weapon, missile, תַּחֲלִימִים to defend ourselves against death.

shifts for the effecting of his safety in avoiding such evils as he fears will fall upon him; which endeavors are to no purpose. *Neither shall wickedness deliver those are are given to it, ולערל*, when man for want of true wisdom have run themselves into errors and danger, they seek out foolish and unwarrantable counsels to rid themselves free, but become so much the faster entangled, *verse 8*.

**THE THIRD PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE WISE ORDERING OF LIFE: A  
RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF THE WICKED MAN'S PROSPERITY:  
ECCLESIASTES 8:9-13**

Here is a problem which has plagued humanity: Why do the wicked prosper – ever? How am I supposed to understand the prosperity of the wicked? Is prosperity really evidence of divine favor? Solomon answers this question by calling us to look at the entire context. Think of a mystery novel: There are many questionable things which occur and we cannot know what they mean until we read the end of the story. When we have the end, we will be able to understand the meaning of the prior events.

It is the same with our questions about the prosperous wicked. Our failure to put their lives into the proper context will cause us to wildly misunderstand the meaning of their lives.

**TEXT:**

*9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. 10 And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. 11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. 12 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: 13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.*

**COMMENTARY:**

A right esteem and use of the prosperity of wicked men & their long impunity which is another sore temptation to badness, against which a wiseman is well defended. In this point we have to note:

***A Temptation to Doubt God***

*The Circumstance:*

The temptation which Solomon sets down as an heedful and experimental observation of his own, *All this have I seen, and applied my heart*, which he doth by the instance in the most eminent kind of men upon whom mens' eyes are most usually fastened, *viz*, in the prosperity of tyrants and great but wicked ones, who rule all things at their pleasures, and pass uncontrolled. *There is a time when one man ruleth over another to his own hurt*, not only to the hurt of those that under government, but to the destruction of himself in conclusion; when thought it be long first, he shall receive the punishment to his injustice and tyranny in the misuse of his place, and God's healthful ordinance, *verse 9*.

The freedom and impunity of these men is expressed in the next verse, where we have a double benefit they enjoy,

First apparent benefit: Honorable burial after long continuance in their dignity and greatness, *I saw the wicked rulers buried*, with pomp, lamentation and much funeral solemnity, as an honorable close of the dignity and greatness of their lives. *Who had come and gone*, enjoyed their state for their times, and left it peaceably at their death; or had gone in and out before the people in rule and government, *from the place of the holy*, viz, the seat of justice and government, where holy judgment ought to be executed & holy judges ought to sit at the seat of judgment is a throne of God, and they should be gods that sit there.

Second apparent benefit: Oblivion of their names and doings, a great benefit to a wicked man to have his memory die with him, which if it be preserved stinks in keeping, and remains as a curse and perpetual disgrace, *and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done*, there was no more memory of them, not in that place where they had practiced all their wickedness and villany. Thus in life and death, and after death these men seem to be happy; all which is notwithstanding vanity, and but seeming prosperity: *This is also vanity*, as is after shewed, *verse 10*.

And this is the temptation, now follows, The issue and event springing therefrom, which is double different

#### *The Judgment of the Fool:*

*What the fool thinks:* In the fool or wicked man led by carnal discourse: In whom the prosperity and long happiness of evil men works hardness of heart, obstancy and presumption in evil courses, *because sentence is not speedily, & c. verse 11*.

#### *The Judgment of the Wiseman:*

In the wise and godly guided by the Spirit of God, who hereupon take not any liberty to deliver themselves to be bold in sinning, but stand fast in their integrity, judging right of the state of the good and bad in this life: Which spiritual judgment is set down.

A bad man, though he prosper long in evil doing, shall not be blessed.

A good man though he suffer evil, and that long, or enjoy good but a while, yet shall still be blessed. That latter part of the former member of the antithesis follows not immediately by the first, but after the latter part of the second member.

The whole opposition stands thus,

1. For the blessedness of the godly: *though a godly man suffer evil an hundred, i.e., many times and days be shortened, yet surely I know that it shall be well with those that fear God, viz, in truth and sincerity, which fear before him*, because they are in God's presence.
2. For the unhappiness of the ungodly, *though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and*

*his days be prolonged, i.e, continue long unpunished in his wickedness, yes it shall not be well with the wicked, he shall not escape severe punishment in the end: Nor shall he prolong his days, ordinarily he shall not live out half his days, but if he live long, yet shall he not live ever, his long days are but a short life, which are as a shadow, when longest, they vanish to nothing. All this confirmed by reason from his own sin, whihc certainly brings misery, because he fears not before God is devoid of grace and stands in no awe of God's judgment, verses 12, 13.*

**A FOURTH PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE WISE ORDERING OF LIFE:  
UNDERSTANDING “CHANCE” EVENTS, PART 1: ECCLESIASTES 8:14-17**

Solomon now provides some context for understanding seemingly chance events, that is events which seem contrary to or independent of God’s good providence. What should we do when we face seemingly “chance” events? Should we just go and sin, because the outcome on earth seems to favor the wicked?

Solomon notes this temptation, and then responds by explaining that we cannot tell from our vantage point exactly what God is doing. As the ESV Study Bible notes on verses 10-13: “The Preacher trusts divine revelation to be more reliable than his own empirical observation and knows that, ultimately, justice will be done.”

**TEXT:**

*Ecc. 8:14-17: There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God gives him under the sun. When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.*

**COMMENTARY:**

A just censure of the seeming confusion, chance and casualties which appears in the different and unequal administration of human affairs. Which is another great temptation to make us cast off all care of piety and godliness and to draw us to atheism and Epicurianism. Here as before are set down (1) the temptation, and (2) the judgment to be made

*The Temptation*

The temptation, the unequal and seemingly unjust ordering of things in regard of punishment or reward of virtue and vice, viz, the good men many times face as ill as bad men, and bad men have as good success as those that are best. *There is a vanity, that there be just men, to whom & c., verse 14.*

*The Judgment of the Flesh*

The two-fold judgment of the flesh:

In general, censuring God's various administration of things for vanity, because it is not able to perceive the reason, justice and equity of God's so doing. *There is a vanity, & c.* and *I said this is also vanity, verse 14.*

In particular, drawing from hence resolutions to betake themselves to a licentious and voluptuous life: *Then I commended mirth*, seeing a man loses nothing by badness, nor gets by goodness what should we care for anything but to be merry and take our pleasure here. *For there is nothing better, & c.* other and greater commodity by anything in this world no man is likely to get. Thus do wicked men make ill conclusions of good premises; and ill applications of otherwise profitable precepts, *verse 15.*

### *The Judgment of the Spirit*<sup>71</sup>

That God's government of the world is so secret and wonderful that the wisest cannot in all things search out and discern the reason and manner of his working: which should restrain rash opinions and carnal censures of God's providence, condemning of injustice, or advancing fortune in its place. This proposition is explicated:

In Solomon's industrious inquiry after the right understanding of this point, *I applied mine heart*, with all attention and heedfulness *to know wisdom* in all kinds whatsoever, and more specially, *to see the business which is done under the Sun*, to take notice of all works of providence in the government of the world: And this I did with incessant study, *for also there is that neither day nor night sees sleep with his eyes*, as others eagerly set on a business, follow it night and day, so I gave myself to this study and observation without intermission, *verse 16.*

In the extent and issue of his endeavor, *viz.* that the exact knowledge of God's working cannot be found out. *Then I beheld all the worlds of God, that*, the reasons are

1. It is above the power of man's industry, *because though a man labor to seek it out.*
2. It is above the reach of man's wisdom, *yea, further, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it out, verse 17.*

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<sup>71</sup> At this point, Pemble provides an introductory sentence promising "three propositions" on the Spirit's judgment. By Pemble's own layout of the text, there is only one proposition which is made up of two subpoints; of which the second subpoint is comprised of two sub-subpoints. For clarity's sake, the introductory sentence has been omitted. Ed.

## **A FOURTH PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE WISE ORDERING OF LIFE: UNDERSTANDING “CHANCE” EVENTS, PART 2: ECCLESIASTES 9:1-12**

In this section, Pemble finds competing arguments of the Spirit and the Flesh which seek to understand God’s actings.

### **TEXT:**

*For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. Ecclesiastes 9:1-12*

### ***The Spirit: One Cannot Tell God’s Heart by His Hand***

That howsoever secret and hidden the disposing of all things be, yet all men and all actions are guided by a divine providence. The certainty of which point, with that which follows, is commended to us by Solomon’s exact observations and the final resolution of his inquiries, *For all this I considered in mine heart, even to declare all this.* What? *That the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God* to dispose as he sees good, how wise soever [sic] they be in their own contrivances, to reward when and in what manner he pleases, how righteous and well deserving they seem to be, *verse 1.*

That God's love or hatred towards men is not discernable by outward things and events, such as lie open to our view and common observation. *No man knows either love or hatred by all that is before him*, by such as here befall them in the world, *verse 1*.

The reason is added from the alike condition of the good and bad in all outward things: *All things come alike to all, and there is not even to the righteous and to the wicked*, both which are in the words following described by synonyms *to the clean and unclean, the good and the sinner* and properties *to him that sacrifices and to him that sacrifices not, he that swears (commonly) as he that fears an oath* makes conscience of it, *verse 2*.

### ***The Judgment of the Flesh***

The judgment the Spirit thus declared, Solomon returns again to consider the judgment of the flesh which was before, *verse 15*. Briefly delivered but here is more distinctly expounded. Touching the use then that carnal men make of this point of God's providence, we are to note:

Their practice, whereto they fall upon this occasion, generally expressed in the 3 verse, *viz* a giving of themselves up to all impiety. *That is an evil among all things that are done under the Sun*. What? *That there is one event to all*. Why this evil? Seeing God's government may not be condemned as bad it is evil in the evil consequent and use wicked men make of it: *Yea also the hearts of the sons of men is full of evil and madness in their hearts while they live they live like man men in all sinful practices and after that they go to the dead, die like beasts, and come to nothing as they imagine*. This practice of impiety is illustrated.

By the reason that move them onto it, which is in brief an erroneous opinion, that there is nothing to be looked and hoped for after this life, *For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope, viz.*, of enjoying some good, not *ex opposito* to him that is dead, which is proverbially expressed, *for a living dog, the worse man if living, is vetter than a dead lion*, the best man that is in his grave, *verse 4*.

### ***The Arguments of the Flesh***

This opinion is further amplified and confirmed by Sunday seeming arguments: First, the living have knowledge as of other things, so of death, and therefore study always to compass the pleasures of life, but the dead know and take care for nothing, *For the living know, & c.*

Second, the living have reward of honor or profit for their doings, the dead enjoy not this benefit; who are so far from it, that the memory of them and all their works is forgotten, *verse 5*.

Third, the living have a great part and portion in the things and affairs of this life, there is what they may love, and hate and envy, but th dead are deprived of the use of all things belonging to this life. *Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy & c.* by which appears that these carnal wretches confine all the good that man can enjoy with the compass of this present life.

Fourth, by one particular of their practice, *viz.*, voluptuous living, or Epicurianism, set forth:

In its parts:

1. Diet and feasting without fear, in all jollity and profuse mirth, *Go thy way, eat thy bread, & c.* ver. 6
2. Apparel: *Let thy garments be always white*, as was and is the fashion in eastern countries, in triumphs, feasts, and other occasions of mirth and joy.
3. Curatura corporis, by synecdoche, of ointments, much used by those eastern people in banquetting, bathings and at other times: *Let not oil be lacking on thy head, pamper up thy body with all delights, verse 8.*
4. Carnal pleasures: where yet the Epicure hath some regard to common honesty, shame of men, fear of law, and so restrains himself to his own wife, with whom he may enjoy voluptate tura & facile parabili, *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all & c.*, verse 9.

In the sum and general, *Whatsoever thou findest to do*, in a matter of pleasure or profit, *do it with all thy might*, spare no pain nor cost to get all contentment to theyself whilst thou livest, *verse 10.*

In this course of worldly delights the carnal man encourages himself by false persuasions and arguments misapplied:

First, that God is well pleased with him, to whom he affords liberty and scope of pleasures and licentiousness. Be merry. Why? *For God now accepteth thy works, verse 7.*

Second, that in this life nothing can be further expected than the delightful use of all things we get by our labor, which though it be good with moderation, and all that the things of this life can afford, yet it is not all which a man must seek after, resting herein without care of the life to come, as the carnal man doth. *For that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun, verse 9.*

Third, that *post mortem nihil*, "Intend," saith the Epicure, "thy pleasures, and follow thy affairs hard whilst thou livest:" Why? "In the grave there is nothing to be done or suffered, *for there is no work to be wrought, nor yet means to effect it, no device, knowledge nor wisdom, & c.*" *verse 10.* So is the carnal man's practice. Next follows the

### ***The Motives of the Flesh***

Occasion that drives carnal men upon the former ill opinions and evil practices: And that is, *that there is no providence, but that all things are carried by chance and fortune;* which conclusion they gather from a double experience:

First, of mens' doings and endeavors, which are often frustrated of their end and event, when there is greatest probability of success. *I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, & c. but time and chance happeneth to all, verse 11.*

Second, of mens' sufferings in such harms and dangers as befall them. Wherein he compares men to birds and fishes, that fall ignorantly and suddenly into the net and snare. *For man knoweth not his time, as fishes & c. so are the sons of men snared, & c. verse 12.*

## **A FIFTH PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE WISE ORDERING OF LIFE: THE RIGHT CONSIDERATION OF DISGRACE AND CONTEMPT: ECCLESIASTES 9:13-18**

(Introduction by Pemble) So much of the fourth point, wherein wisdom's excellency is set forth: now follows the fifth: Particular wherein the fruits of wisdom is seen: in a right consideration of that disgrace & contempt which is cast upon goodness joined with a poor and mean condition: Which is another sore temptation, keeping us back from resolution in virtue and godliness.

### **TEXT:**

*13 This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: 14 There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: 15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. 16 Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. 17 The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.*

### **COMMENTARY:**

#### ***The Temptation:***

The temptation, *viz.*, disgrace and disrespect of goodness coupled with mean fortune, notwithstanding the benefits which others reap by it: Expressed in a parable or true history, setting forth both the benefit and the neglect of such goodness, in the most eminent kind, *viz.*, to and by a whole state, which Solomon sets down as his most heedful observation, and as a point of much moment, and worth his notice, *This wisdom I have also seen & c. and it is great unto me, verse 13.* What was that it follows in story wherein are:

The danger, a city beseiged: aggravated by man circumstance, *a little city, a few men in it, weakly defended, beseiged by a great king, with a great army and strongly assaulted he built great bulwarks against it, verse 14.*

The deliverance: The person, a poor man, but a wise man, *Now there was found & c.* The means, *By wisdom he delivered the city, verse 15.*

The reward bestowed on the author of their escape, *viz.*, neglect and forgetfulness, *yet no man remembered that same poor man, to honor and reward him for his defense, verse 15.*

#### ***Solomon's Judgment:***

Solomon's or the wise man's censure and resolution thereupon:

His censure of wisdom in general: *Wisdom is better than strength*, civil policy with religious piety is better than the strength of walls or force of men, for the defense of a State.

Wisdom in a poor man, that notwithstanding the benefit of it is despised and set light of, which appears in the effect: *His words are not heard*, his counsels and advice are either rejected with scorn or if heard not followed: or if followed and regarded, not rewarded, *verse 16*.

His resolution upon the point delivered in two conclusions or axioms: First, preferring a poor man's wise and humble counsel before the imperious and proud command of a foolish ruler. *The words of a wise man*, though poor and mean yet among wise men, *ex antithesis* who can best judge what is best heeded and followed *are heard in quiet* being delivered with a calm submissive and humble spirit, *more than the cry* loud, clamorous, and wilfull commands *of him that ruleth* captin, magistrate, or great governor *among fools* disobedient and untractable people. Or the opposition may stand thus: A poor man's sober and quiet advice may prevail with the unwise multitude more than a ruler's authority and loud command, *verse 17*.

Second, preferring wisdom before all other means of security and defense, to the end that though it be despised, yet we should not therefore forsake it to trust to other. *Wisdom* – true policy with true piety – *is better than weapons of war*, all warlike provisions and preparations though they promise much security, yet cannot procure that safety which wisdom alone does. Which is further *confirmed by the contrary*, *one sinner* that errs in counsel and policy, or sinns against godliness and piety *destroyeth much good* though he be but one, yet brings ruin unto many, his error and sin overthrows a whole army, city, commonwealth and defeats all good provisions made for their benefit and advancement. *Verse 18*.

**THE SIXTH ASPECT OF WISDOM: THE WISE ORDERING OF LIFE  
EXAMINED IN FOUR PARTICULAR INSTANCES OF HUMAN CONDUCT:**

In Ecclesiastes 10:1-12:7, Solomon turns from a general examination of the ordering of life to an examination of four particular aspects of life<sup>72</sup>: (1) towards ourselves (Ecclesiastes 1-3); (2) our relationship with our superiors (Ecclesiastes 10:4-20); (3) our relationship to our inferiors (Ecclesiastes 11:1-6); (4) our relationship toward God (Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7).

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<sup>72</sup> “So much of those effects and properties of true wisdom, which are more general. Now Solomon proceeds to reckon other parts and fruits of it, as they more particularly concern us in a fourfold carriage of ourselves.”

**ASPECT 6, PART I: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OURSELVES  
(ECCLESIASTES 10:1-3)**

Wisdom is a great benefit to ourselves, personally. It causes us to be careful of our conduct and our reputation. It also protects us in our wider dealings in the world.

**TEXT:**

*1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. 2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left. 3 Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.*

**COMMENTARY:**

Towards ourselves in our more private conversations wherein wisdom affords us a double benefit:

First, of circumspection and wariness in our carriage, to maintain our good name and reputation by heedful avoiding [of] all things that might stain: all indiscreet and sinful behavior, though but in some small matter. This expressed behavior, though but in some small matter. This expressed in an excellent similitude, comparing a good name to a good ointment of the apothecary, a curious confection well made by art: folly, error, and slips in our conversation, to dead flies in a pot of sweet ordors: Disgrace and shame that comes by sin, to the stink and putrefaction of a costly ointment, which is very loathsome: Lastly, in the degree, dead flies, small and little creatures, yet even a few of them are enough to mar a whole box, so a little folly is sufficient to stain the reputation of him that is in honor for his wisdom; as one sinner destroys much good, *verse 2*.

Second, of dexterity and expedition in the dispatch of all affairs, *The heart of the wise is at his right hand, i.e.*, in all business he hath counsel and wisdom present with him for ready and safe ordering of his proceedings. He puts none but his right hand to his work, the most fit and commodious instrument to work well and speedily, and this hand he so sets to his business, that it is guided by his heart, wisdom and good advice direct him to his doings, *verse 2*. This is illustrated by the contrary in fools, *but a fool's heart is at his left hand, i.e.*, he doth his business rashly, unadvisedly, untowardly, *v. 2.*, which folly is further discovered in an unwise man's ordinary conversation, *ye also when he that is a fool walketh by the way*, by his ordinary behavior, gait, gesture, countenance, speech, *his wisdom faileth him*, he wants wit to carry himself well; yea, he hath not wit enough to conceal his folly, but proclaims it openly to all, *and he saith to every that he is a fool, verse 3*.

## ASPECT 6, PART 2: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR SUPERIORS (ECCLESIASTES 10:4-20)

In this section, Solomon gives wisdom for dealing with our superiors. Wisdom and tact in dealing with difficult – even dangerous – superiors can help one navigate through a perplexing circumstance.

### TEXT:

*4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences. 5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: 6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. 7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth. 8 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. 9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. 10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct. 11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babler is no better.*

*12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. 14 A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? 15 The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.*

*16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! 17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! 18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.*

*20 Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.*

### COMMENTARY:

Toward superiors in the commonwealth in case of offense that we may conceive at them, wherein great is the sue of true wisdom to bridle and refrain all unlawful desires and attempts against men in authority. The offence that we may take at their doings is two-fold:

*Dealing with a Private Insult (Ecclesiastes 10:4)*

In regard of ourselves, for some wrong the Ruler hath done us, or for some private displeasure he conceives at us for some offence done to him. *If the spirit*, wrath, indignation, *If the ruler rise up against thee*, whether rightfully or wrongfully: What must be done in this case? The rule and remedy which wisdom in this matter prescribes, *Leave not thy place*, office, duty, and obedience, oppose not wealth against wealthy, take heed of stubbornness and violence, but use fair means in submission and discreet bearing and forbearing: The reason follows from the benefit, *for yielding* lenity, submission, *pacifieth*, causes to cease, *great offenses* or sins, i.e., great and just displeasure conceived by the ruler for thy sin and offenses, or his unjust and sinful displeasure taken for no cause: Whereas a contrary obstinancy and resistance does but exasperate his wrath and aggravate thine offense, *verse 4*.

### ***The Wise Response to Bad Bad Government: Ecclesiastes 10:5-15 & 20***

In regard of others in common, in case of the prince's bad and disorderly government, whereof here is expressed but one instance, yet such a one is commonly the greatest corrosive to subjects' hearts, *viz.*, preferment of the bad and disrespect of the well deserving. In which Solomon sets down:

The evil which Solomon took good notice of: First, in the commonness of it. *There is an evil which I have observed under the sun*. Secondly, in the nature of it, *as an error*, it is an error in state policy and government. Thirdly, in the root of it, *which proceedeth from the ruler*, it is the prince's fault, ignorance of vice, that good are kept under; and bad advanced in court and country, *verse 5*.

What this evil is, follows in the next verse, *Folly*, foolish men, *i.e.*, both weak for abilities of government, and wicked for life and conversation, *is set in great dignity*, advanced to place of honor and rule, *and the rich*, in grace and civil wisdom. *Sit in low place*, kept in mean and obscure condition, *verse 6*. The absurdity and unreasonableness of this disorder, illustrated by comparison of the like, *I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking on the ground*. It is a great indignity, as for the servant to ride on horse back, and the master to lack a-foot: So for men of base and slavish conditions to be advanced above those that are free, noble, prudent and pious spirits, *verse 7*.

### ***A Wise Person is Careful With His Conduct in Response to Bad Government: Ecclesiastes 10:8-11***

The remedy, submission and yielding, seeking reformation by all fair and loving means. To which duty Solomon exhorts subjects by a dehortation [an argument to dissuade] from the contrary, *viz.*, discontentment, rebellion, innovation, and sedition. This undutiful and rebellious affection against princes is discovered in three particulars, from all which are divided:

*In fact:*

***First, secret treachery:*** the punishment whereof is, that the mischief lights upon the traitor. *He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it*, a simile from unwary huntsmen, that making pits to catch wild beasts (usual in eastern countries) and covering them over with leaves & c., fall into the same themselves as they pass that way, *verse 8*.

**Second, open violence and rebellion:** which how ill it succeeds, Solomon shews: By similitudes which are three:

Image one: Pulling up old hedges, wherein serpents, erts, adders, snakes & c., usually lurk, that endanger the hands and feet of him that goes about it. *He that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him* so that he he that seeks to overthrow the government of a commonwealth, and breakdown the fences and mounds of rule and subjection, & c., *verse 8.*

Image two: Removing of great stones, in pulling down of stone walls and old buildings, and lifting, carrying & c. wherein without much care men are greatly endangered: *Who so removeth stones shall be hurt therewith*<sup>73</sup> so that he attempts to lose and remove the joints and pieces of settled government, there is danger that like Sampson, he'll be crushed in the ruin, *verse 9.*

Image three: Cleaving of knotty and hard timber with ill tools, wherein there is danger of breaking our tools and maiming ourselves: *and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby*, so is he that uses violent means against a prince, *verse 9.*

**Third, by the contrary,** a wise and gentle carriage of matters, whereby all disorders and government are sooner reformed than by rough and furious courses. This inferred upon occasion of the last similitude of cleaving of wood, *If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge:* If the axes and wedges be not sharp, *he must put to more strength*, yea, but what shall he be better for that? Not a whit, such a woodcleaver shall but weary himself, sweat out his strength, endanger his limbs by recoiling of the ax or wedge, so in the former sin, he that will by main strength remove stones shall strain his back, break his joints. He that rashly and furiously will pluck down a hedge shall scratch himself, put out his eyes, gore his legs.

So that in sum, the more violence and wilfulness subjects use against rulers, the greater danger they bring themselves into. But now on the other side, *Wisdom is profitable to direct*, if art and skill be used, it is not hard for a hedger to new make the oldest hedge, or mason to remove the greatest stones, or carpenter to cleave the most bony and churlish piece of timber: So for subjects by wise and moderate courses to procure reformation of a princes foulest errors and disorders.

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<sup>73</sup> Prov. 26.27.

***A Wise Person is Careful With His Words in Response to Bad Government:  
Ecclesiastes 10:12-15 & 20***

In this section, Solomon discusses how to get on with bad government. This section seems particularly apt for those people coming after Solomon, who were to suffer under diminished stature and poor government.

**TEXT:**

*The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city. . . . Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter. (Ecclesiastes 10:12-15 & 20)*

**COMMENTARY:**

In words, when inferiors use discontented, contumelious threatening, and seditious speeches, of or to their rulers. This fault of perverse and harsh words uttered against a prince is set down with its opposite virtues of mild and gentle speech, and both expressed:

In a similitude, wherein the wise persuasion and gentle language which a discreet man will use to a vicious governor, are compared to a charm or enchantment used over a serpent that keeps him from biting and poisoning. But a fool in the lawless liberty of his tongue in rash, unseasonable and furious reproofs and reproaches of [the] governor's faults, is like him that handles a serpent and uses no art to charm him, by which means he is sure to be bitten and stung, *Surely the serpent will bit without enchantment, and a babbler, a tongue-master, a great talker, and fault finder in state matters, is no better, verse 11.*

***The Difference Between the Speech of the Wise and the Foolish***

Plainly in certain sentences clearly expressing the difference between a wise man and a fool in this matter of speech.

In the event and fruit, *The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious*, wine favor and acceptance with his prince and others, appease displeasure and procure reconciliation with them. *But the lies of a fool swallow up himself*, by perverse speeches he brings himself in danger of life and limb, incurs the prince's displeasure and falls into his powerful revenge. He undoes himself, not only in part but utterly, his words swallow him up, *verse 12.*

In the nature of it. The words of a foolish man are

**Evil:** Bad in the first entrance and beginning of his talk. *The beginning . . . is foolishness*, his tongue runs before counsel, advice and reason send it. Stark naught in the end and conclusion, *The end of his take is mischievous madness*. He grows unto rage, choler and threatening, and outrageous speeches, which drive him further to mischievous practices and resolutions. *Ex contra*, a wise man's words are good in the beginning, and best in the upshot, *verse 13*.

**Many:** *A fool is full of words*, he is talkative, and uses many word to defend the possibility and likelihood of his foolish and witless enterprises: Which custom of his is expressed, in his vain tautologies. *A man cannot tell what shall be:* and, again, *And what shall be after him, who can tell?* You know not how things may fall out, it may chance thus, and why not so, hope well, put it to the venture, *verse 14*.

### ***The Fool's Conduct***

After the foolish man's attempts both in deed and word, thus severally described, Solomon sets down jointly the issue of both together, which is much ado to no purpose, *the labor of the foolish wearieth one of them*, his enterprises and discourse prove labor in vain to him and others that heed and follow them. The general reason of all, which is, *because he knoweth not how to go to the city, i.e.*, he is utterly ignorant of how to behave himself wisely in matter of policy and civil government, *verse 15*.

### ***Direction***

In thought or words secretly, *curse not the king*, wish not evil to his life & state, *no not in thy thought*, in thy conscience, secretly when no man knows but thyself, *and curse not the rich*, nobles and men of high place and government, *in thy bedchamber*, privily in secret, the reason is advanced from the certain degree of discovery:

- (a) By the unlikely means that we dream not of, *The bird of the air shall carry thy voice*.
- (b) Speedily and swiftly, *and that which hath wings shall tell the matter, verse 20*.

### ***A Warning to the Foolish Ruler: Ecclesiastes 10:16-19***

Now lest upon so strict prohibitions given to keep subjects in compass of their duty, from all rebellious and disloyal are attempts against their rulers: Princes should take license to carry themselves much the more loosely and disorderly, as being privileged to do unjustly, Solomon inserts by way of a brief digression, an admonition to rulers, putting them in the mind, that though subjects may not rebel, yet princes must not be licentious, tyrannous and unjust. This admonition is included in a declaration of that dependence which is between the prince and people, in regard of the good or ill state of the commonwealth. Rulers cannot be either bad or

good only to themselves, but subjects must have a share in both, either by misery or happiness under them. This is severally declared:

### ***The Kingdom Will be in Misery or Happiness, Depending Upon the King***

First, the misery of a people under bad governors, *Woe to thee O Land, when thy King, the highest magistrate is a child*<sup>74</sup>, weak and unwise, or wicked in government and conversations, not always in years, thought yet so most times, that age being subject to abuse by overseers. *And thy princes, inferior rulers, and officers of state, eat in the morning*, are riotous and luxurious, a sign whereof is untimely feasting and full eating in the morning before the labor and pains taking; a foul disorder in governors and great men who spend that time at a full table, which should be employed in hearing and deciding causes of justice, go drunk from their house to the bench<sup>75</sup>. Thus a childish king makes a dissolute nobility, and both these a miserable and wretched people, verse 16.

Second, in the happiness of a commonwealth under good governors. *Blessed art thou O Land when thy king is the son of nobles*, by birth of royal descent and noble blood by institution in virtue, wisdom and policy; which education of nobles especially ought to have. *And thy princes in due season*, in fit and convenient times, *for strength and not for drunkenness* to a good end to enable them for labor; not to pamper themselves in idleness. By which metonymy is meant the moderation, sobriety, and strictness of life required in magistrates and rules over others that they are not to serve their own lust, but to watch over the good of others. A good king makes good officers, and both makes a happy commonwealth, *verse 17*.

### ***The Unhappy State***

The former point concerning the unhappiness of a state under vicious rulers, as it is more common, so it is more distinctly unfolded:

In the nature of that woe wherein this misery standeth & that is, the decay and ruin of such a state where government is thus neglected, set down by comparison with an edifice or building, which if it be in the possession of a careless and slothful inhabitant, runs to ruin for want of reparation. *By much slothfulness*, or by the slothfulness of both hands, which after is in other terms, *through the idleness of the hands*, hanging down of the hands, after the guise of sluggards, whose hands are in their pockets, or hang dangling by their side. *The building decayeth, and the house droppeth through*, the roof is uncovered, and all lies open to wind and weather, so a commonwealth not sheltered with government, *verse 18*.

In the causes of this evil, which are two here named: First, riot and prodigality, when princes and great men take care for nothing but to live in all pleasures & delights, here synecdoche, expressed by feasting, *A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry*.

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<sup>74</sup> Isa. 3.12. As Rehoboam, 40 years old, 1 Kings 14.21, yet a child, 1 Chron. 13.7.

<sup>75</sup> Jer. 21.12, Prov. 31.4,5.

Second, oppressions and exactions of the people, lavish and prodigal spendings must be maintained by griping, covetous and cruel gettings. And princes affected to the former cannot but choose fall to the latter, to pill and poll the poor people, and undo them by taxes and extreme extortion, that they may have money to supply all their voluptuous and luxurious desires, *But money answereth to all*: so when a people is impoverished, and public treasure perverted to wrong uses, a state must needs down, *verse 19*.

## ASPECT 6, PART 3: DEALING WITH OUR INFERIORS: ECCLESIASTES 11:1-6

This section explains how we are to deal with poor: by giving liberally to succor them in their need.

### TEXT:

*1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. 2 Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. 3 If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. 4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. 5 As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. 6 In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

### COMMENTARY:

So much of our carriage towards superiors; now follows in the third place our demeanor towards inferiors.

Inferiors in one particular kind, *viz*, the poor and needy: toward whom the principal virtue which wisdom teacheth us to exercise is liberality, here to shew wherein one special use of riches (so much doted upon) doth consist; quite contrary to men's conceit, who would be happy by treasuring up, not distributing abroad. This duty of charity and liberality to men in necessity is

First, proposed and commended to us in the first verse, *Cast thy bread upon the waters*, *i.e.* give alms of thine own substance to the poor. Bread is put for all things whatsoever, whereby our neighbors wany may be relieved. By waters are meant the poor that cannot recompense thee, upon whom whatsoever is bestowed is in the opinion of carnal and covetous wretches cast away, and employed to as good purpose, as if a man should hurl his bread down the river, or into the sea to feed fishes. It seems the precept is a proverbial speech used by niggards to defend their over-sparing which proverb Solomon here crosseth: It is but bread cast inot the water, saith the covetous: yet cast it there, saith Solomon, and this precept he confirms by a reason, directly opposing the carnal conceit of loss, *for thou shalt find it after many days*, thou shalt be rewarded, and reap the fruit and benefit of thy liberality in due time it may be not presently, yet after many days, when thou hast patiently expected a while, *verse 1*.

Second, amplified and further urged on us, by the extent of our liberality, that we sow not sparingly a little, and that to a few, but *give a portion*, a liberal gift, *to seven and also to eight*, *i.e.*, to many, to all as their need deserves & our ability permits. The reason to move us to this largess is here again quite contrary to the covetous man's conceit. I see, saith he, the forepart of my life, but not the latter end, I may come to want that which I now give: Nay, therefore, saith the spirit of God, "give because *thou knowest not what evil will be on the earth*, thou mayest

come to poverty, and stand in need of others' help; now then thou art rich, do good to the poor, and make thee many friends against an evil time, who may then succour thee, *verse 2*.

The extent of liberality is further confirmed by the similitude from natural things, which are communicative of their goodness. *If the clouds be full, they empty themselves upon the earth.* Clouds have their moisture not for themselves but for the benefit of the earth, the more they have within the more they pour down, and that not upon some one man's land only, but over the whole of the country. Such should rich men be with their riches.

Liberality is also commended by prevention of an objection, some are wicked and unworthy persons and what a man look for by relieving of such? Yea, Solomon answers, be he worthy or unworthy that receives thine alms, thou that givest it with an honest heart, shalt not lose thine reward. Which is set forth by a simile of a tree which is felled, which *if it falls towards the south or towards the north, in the place where it falleth, their shall it be*, however it fall, yet still is the owners and he may have commodity by it, *verse 3*.

### ***Response to Objections:***

Prevention of such objection and doubts as carnal men may frame, out of their covetous and distrustful hearts: O, I am in debt, I have rents and purchases to pay, money is scant, it's a hard time, I am young, I'll tarry till I have got more wealth, I am old and everybody pulls from me, I am not sure what reward I shall have when I am dead, and I see no likely means to save any recompense for my liberality on such persons: a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; and how, when, which way will God doe thus for me and mine? While the grass grows, the horse starves, and et cetera. To these and thousand like objections, Solomon opposes two answers:

First answer: Against pretences of unseasonableness in doing good. The vanity, whereof he confutes by comparing it with the like in matter of husbandry, *He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.* He is a foolish and unprovident husbandman that will delay and put off his seed time and harvest upon every change of weather: it is too dry, or too moist, too hot, or too cold, 'tis like to snow or rain, the wind will be too high & c. Therefore let's tarry another and another day; we would think him to be lewd and lazy, that for such idle fears would forego his season. As foolish are men in this spiritual earing & harvest of good works, who put off upon simple excuses till a more convenient seasons, so long till time and season be all past, *verse 4*.

Second answer: Against distrust and diffidence in God's providence, because we see not the means how we shall be recompensed. This doubt Solomon removes, by putting us in the mind of God's unsearchable wisdom: and our ignorance in the course of his proceedings. And that therefore we are not to limit his powers, to prescribe time and means and manner to his wisdom.

Our ignorance of God's wonderful working in a civil affairs, is expressed by our want of knowledge in natural things, comparing both together? *As thou knowest not the way of the spirit, either of the wind, the nature whereof we know not, John 3, or with reference to that which follows, of the soul: how a living, reasonable soul is bred or brought into conception, Nor how the bones or body synecdoche, do grow is fashioned, and increaseth in the womb of her that is with child* as in these, so in other things, *Thou knowest not the work of God who maketh all,*

wherefore it is good to commit thyself to his wisdom and providence, and not to trust thine own, *verse 5*.

From these answer is inferred a horatory conclusion of this whole business touching charity<sup>76</sup>, therefore, do good upon all occasions, seeing thou knowest not which will bring home the greatest blessing and reward, or whether all will prove alike beneficial to thee. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, i.e.*, be liberal at all times early and late, in youth and age: he continues the allegory of sowing and plowers sow in the evening as well as mornings, *For thou knowest not whether shall prosper*, shall bring in the better crop, *either this or that*, the late or the early sown seed, *or whether both shall be alike good*. Take all opportunities, and some certainly will hit home<sup>77</sup>, *verse 6*.

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<sup>76</sup> John 22:28.

<sup>77</sup> Abraham and Lot being courteous to all, at last received angels.

**ASPECT 6, PART 4: A WISE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD: ECCLESIASTES 11:7-12:7**

In this last section of argument before the conclusion, Solomon turns our minds to wisdom toward God. This entails meditation upon our death. Now, there are some, such as the wealthy or the young who especially will not tolerate thoughts of death. For these people, Solomon has particular direction and admonition. Having directed us to consider death, Solomon then provides a beautiful meditation upon death, likening the human body to a decaying house.

The remembrance of our ultimate end will cause us to rightly value our days, cause us to act wisely before God, and thus contribute to our true happiness.

**TEXT:**

*7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: 8 But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. 9 Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. 10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

*12. 1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; 2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: 3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, 4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; 5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: 6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. 7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

**COMMENTARY:**

Now follows in the fourth place the part and fruit of wisdom, which directeth us in our carriage.

***Wisdom Toward God: Meditations on Death***

Towards God, as the upshot and compliment of all the rest. And this stands in the care of religion, and of the worship of God. One principle part and means whereof is the meditation and preparation for death and judgment, an excellent means to begot and a singular trial to discover a man's care of piety. This therefore Solomon presseth on all, but especially on two sorts of men, to whom the practice of this point is most difficult: These are:

### ***The Wealthy Who Love This Life do not Think of Death***

Men that are far in love with the pleasures and profits of this life, to whom the remembrance of death is bitter and unwelcome. Touching this kind of men, we have here expressed:

Their affection and too high esteem of the world, set down as in their own words, *Truly the light is sweet*, a life is sweet, especially with light, i.e., pleasure and contentment, *and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun*, to live in the sunshine of prosperity, abundance, honor and delight. Who would change for uncertainties in another world? It cannot be good that deprives us of such contents, *verse 7*.

The remedy to abate this their love, and turn it another way: Which is taken from a three-fold consideration:

1. The certainty of death.
2. The long abode in the grave, above the length of life.

Both these are set down in opposition to the worldlings conceit, *But if a man live man years and rejoice in them all*, be it so that long life and perpetual pleasures and joys meet together in one man: What is he the better, can he enjoy them always? No. *Yet let him remember the days of darkness*, of death and the grave, let him for all that bethink himself that he must die at last. And when he is dead, what will become of the comforts of his life, how quickly will the short span of his life be forgotten and swallowed up in the long and many days of his abode in the darkness of the grave *for they shall be many*.

3. The uncertain continuance of life and delights none knows how long he shall live, or live merrily. *All that cometh is vanity*, we know what is present, of future times we are uncertain, *verse 8*.

### ***The Young Who Love This Life and do not of Death***

Young men, who presuming upon their age, put far off [from] them the fear of death, and also care of religion and godliness. Here also we have to note:

The usual practice of young men, which Solomon expresseth by an ironical concession, by way of mockage and bitter scorn, premitting them to do what willingly and commonly they practice, which course he take because youth is wilfull, selfconceited and impatient of reproof,

wherefore he seems to yield them what they would have, that he may the more sting them afterward. The sum of their practice is an incessant pursuit of thier pleasures, to give satisfaction to their lust and desires without control, *Rejoice O young man in thy youth*, because thou art young and do it thoroughly too, *let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, walk in the way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes, i.e., live after thy lusts, and do what thou wilt, a thing which young men love as their lives, verse 9.*

### **How to Get the Young Man's Attention**

The remedy and means to divert young men from such sinful counsels, which are two:

**First:** Meditation on God's judgment, whereunto young men must certainly come to give an account and receive censure for their doings as well as any other. *But know that for all these things for all the sins of thy youth, God will bring thee though thou be unwilling to come, God will bring thee perforce, to judgment to be examined, condemned and punished, verse 9.*

**Second:** Reformation of life following thereupon: This is two-fold:

1. Forbearance of evils, *Therefore, remove sorrow from thine heart.* So I do, may the young man say, giving myself to all jollity and carnal pleasure. Nay this is not mirth but sorrow and indignation, stirring up God's wrath, which will bring heaviness in the end unto thy heart<sup>78</sup>. So contrary is the judgment of the Spirit touching sinful pleasure, unto the opinion of the flesh. But yet lest he should not be understood, the Holy Ghost expounds himself in plainer terms, *and put away evil from thy flesh*, avoid sin, fly from fleshly lusts and vain pleasure. Fly sin and escape sorrow, a merry heart and a holy heart go together. This exhortation is confirmed by a reason, from the vanishing and fleeting condition of youth and youthful pleasueres, which crosseth the conceit of young men that imagine their hot blood, lusty bodies, beauty, activeness, will last always, and their pleasures never be at an end. *For childhood and youth are vanity*, are soon spent and therefore better well than ill-spent: pleasure will soon be past and then sorrow and sting of conscience tarry behind. This morning of man's age quickly come to noon, and then to night, & c. *verse 20.*
2. Doing of good in the care of piety and all religious services of God even in youth<sup>79</sup>, *Remember thy Creator*, words of knowledge in Scripture imply affection and practice: Remember, i.e, know and fear, love, serve and obey thy God: For why? He is the Creator, and therefore thou owest him all worship and obedience at all times, in youth as well as age, *In the days of thy youth* while thou art young, strong, lusty, and best able in all faculties of soul and body to perform best service. This exhortation of young men to the study and exercise of godliness,

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<sup>78</sup> Prov. 14.3.

<sup>79</sup> Deut. 8, 11.22. Psalms 9.18 & 196 (???)21.

and that betimes is urged upon them by presenting their view and double discommodity, which by delay creeps upon them.

### ***You Will Grow Old***

Of old age, the convenience and miseries whereof are here lively described by Solomon, intimating the contrary commodity of young years, that men might be the better persuaded to look to religion betimes. This description is

### ***General Description of Old Age***

General, the days of old age are evil, and such as take away all our delights and comfort in livign, *while the evil days come not, nor the years, verse 1.* Wherein the evil and unpleasantness of this age stands, is shewed allegorically in the next verse, *While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, i.e.,* all the comforts and contements which younger years enjoy be turned into discomforts and afflictions, pains, diseases, and aches of the body, poverty and trouble in estate, weakeness and infirmities of the mind, & c., which are here ment by the darkning of the sun, & c. greater and lesser all fail. *Nor the clouds return after the rain* this is a further burden to old age, especially if it come after lewd and ill spent youth, that there is no ease and relief to its miseries, but a continual succession and multiplication of them. Like the other in Winter, when a shower or two do not clear the air, but though it rain much, yet the sky is still overcast with more clouds. So in old age, the end of one disease is the beginning of another, and one grief follows at anothers believes, & c. *verse 2.*

### ***Particular Description of Old Age***

Particular, reckoning up the infirmities incident to the bodies and minds of old men, which disables them for such exercises of piety as young men put themselves unto: These weakneses are numbered up severally:

*In the day when the keepers of thouse shall tremble, i.e.,* the arms & hands which are the bodies defence, shall be weak & tremble with the palsy, . *And the strong men,* the thighs and legs, *shall bow themselves,* bend and buckle in the knees, scare able for feebleness to bear up the body. *And the grinders shall cease,* the teeth, *because they are few* wormeaten, hollow, fallen out, and worn away with age. *And those that look out at the windows be darkened,* the eyes grow dim and blind, *verse 3.*

*And the doors shall be shut in the streets,* he shall keep home, avoiding the company and society of men, at feastings and merry meetings *when the sound of the grinders is low,* when neither his teeth nor his stomach and appetite serve him for much eating. *And he shall rise at the voice of the bird,* his sleep shall depart from him, so that the crowing of cock, or other little noise shall awake him *and all the daughters of music shall be brought low* he shall have neither voice to sing himself, nor ears to hear others, *verse 4.*

*Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high,* he shall be very fearful to walk upon

high places where there may be any danger of falling, where young men are venturous and bold, or of any thing that bunches up in the way, a stone or clod or the like. *And fears shall be in the way* as they walk they are very timorous, because unable to avoid danger, they fear lest they fall, be thrust down or crushed by careless people, riding, running and carrying to & fro, & c.

*And the almond tree shall flourish*, the head grow white and hoary. *And the grasshopper shall be a burthen*, a samll ything shall be too heavy for him to bear. *And desire shall fail*, concupiscence and all vehement and strong affections to pleasure shall be taken away. Some expound these words thus, Old men do not affect the pleasures of Spring, whereof the blossoming of the Almond is a sign; nor of the Summer, signified by the grasshopper, or locust, them making herself fat. The pleasures which these seasons afford are not desired nor regarded by old men.

All these infirmities of old and decrepit age are the symptoms and foretokens of death nigh at hand, shewing that man lives with one foot in the grave and draws onward to the end, *because man goeth to his home, i.e.*, whither all men go in like manner as himself, or where he must abide for a long time. How near death is to him when these token are upon him is shewed in the next words, *the mourners*, his neighbors, friends or hired persons, *go about the street*, prepare all things ready for his funeral and are expecting when they shall follow the hearse, *verse 5*.

Next follows those evils which immediately foregoe death itself, *viz.*, the dissolution and perishing of those parts wherein life and strength of nature consists. *Or ever the silver cord be loosed*, or lengthened, i.e., the marrow of the back and sinews of the other parts of the body be grown so weak and withered, that the joints lose their strength: motion and feeling; *Or the golden bowel be broken* the brain and powers of the head (including the skull, and the meanings as in a cup or bowl) fails and becomes unable to do their office. *Of the pitcher be broken at the fountain or the wheel at the cistern, i.e.*, the instruments that convey nourishment, life, sense and motion from one part to another, as the veins from the liver, the arteries from the heart, & c. lose their drawing and distributing virtue. Whereby the body immediately decays and death follows, the last misery and conclusion of the former, *verse 6*. So much of the first discommodity of old age, the next follows at the heels of it, *viz.*,

Of death, which cuts off all means of enjoying pleasures, so of doing good, there being nothing to be done, but to be suffered in the grave. Which appears by the state of man after death. In his body, which is resolved into that whereof it was made. *Then shall the dust return to the earth*.

In his soul, which upon its seperation must return to God to receive sentence and judgment. *And the spirit return to God that gave it*. God sent it into the body, he may recall it, and judge it for what it hath done in the body. Thus, death is the night wherein no man works, and old age is the evening and latter part of the day where it is ill working, and therefore it is good to be doing betimes in the morning and in our youth to remember our Creator, *verse 7*.

## **CONCLUSION PART 1: ECCLESIASTES 12:8-12**

Here at the end of the book, Solomon gives us the reasons why we should hear him. First, his book is superlative: It was a book written by a man uniquely fit to know of what he wrote; and who wrote with special wisdom from God. Second, other writings are not to be rightly compared with such a book. The opinions of men are ultimately too many and tiresome; that is never the way with Scripture.

### **TEXT:**

*8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. 9 And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. 10 The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. 11 The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. 12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

### **COMMENTARY:**

Hitherto from the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, Solomon hath particularly declared the means of true happiness, so far as in this life men may attain unto it. He comes now in the conclusion of this whole book summarily to deliver up his sentence and judgment touching all that hat been said: Which he doth artificially in two opposite conclusions answers the two parts of his former discorse.

#### ***First Argument: The Value of Solomon's Teaching***

Touching the false means of happiness, of which Solomon repeating by way of conclusion, what was the proposition to be proved in the first verse of this book pronounceth definitively that they are all vanity, *Vanity of vanity, saith the Preacher, all is vanity, verse 8.* Against which sentence lest men should yet take exceptions and not rest satisfied with the former proofs and demonstrations brought to confirm it, but either cavail at Solomon's wisdom and fidelity, or seek to make better trail of things by their own experience and practice, or think to have better information from other men's teachings and writings, than this book can afford: Solomon to prevent this, inserts a serious exhortation & admonition that setting aside all fruitless speculation and vain studies, we would take heed to the doctrine here delivered unto us and by it learn our duty. This admonition is set down by a hyperbation in verse 12, *Moreover, or Rather by these, my son be admonished.* The confirmation and reasons to enforce it are expressed both before and after the admonition: they are of two sorts:

## ***Why Solomon's Word Should be Heeded***

From the excellency and authority of the doctrine contained in this sacred book, which is commended to us by four arguments:

### **Argument One: The Writer**

From the quality of the instrument and penman: Solomon, not the amorous, idolatrous, voluptuous; but the penitent Preacher. He is set forth by two properties: First, wisdom extraordinary above all men in the world, *Because the Preacher was wise*, he must needs be a fool that will not harken to him.

Second, faithfulness and industry in the exercise & employment of this talent of wisdom, which he hid not in a napkin, but used to the instruction of his people. *He still taught the people knowledge*, he taught them always, which painfulness [painstakingness, thoroughness] is amplified:

By its parts [the nature of the author's work]: Observation and attentive markings all such things as might add to his wisdom, *He gave good heed*, or harkened after all such experiments of wisdom which might be got from others. Inventions in the study and search of things in his own wisdom, *And sought out*. By its fruit and former effect, *He set in order many proverbs*, composed many excellent sentences for instruction and piety and good manners, *vid., 1 Kings 4, verse 9*.

### **Argument Two: The Doctrine**

From the quality and nature of the doctrine itself, delivered here and in other books which hath two praises: First, of pleasantness and delighfulness: and therefore if we would read books for delight, let's read this and other of Solomon's works, *The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, verba delectationis & benevolentia*, such as might content and delight the reader.

Of profitableness: Though Solomon's writing was a pleasant and delightful writing, yet it was not either idle nor fabulous fancies, or sinful flatteries to please man's corruptions. But sound and wholesome doctrines such as 2 Tim. 3:16. Here described by two epithets:

1. *That which was written was upright*, written in sincerity, without favoring of man's corruptions and vices, and written to make men upright and straight in soundness of religion without hypocrisy.
2. *The words of truth*, most true and free from all error, lies, & deceiving. Singular arguments to make us give heed to the sacred writings. *Verse 10*.

### **Argument Three: Use of the Doctrine**

From the end and use of holy doctrine, *viz*, edification in godliness and good manners,

which also further unfolds the profitableness of the word of God this use stands in two things, here expressed under similitudes:

First, stirring us up to goodness, by comparing of it to a goad or rod, wherewith heavy and dull cattle are roused up and quickened to their labor, *The words of the wise, i.e.,* Prophets, as himself was, and such other teachers of the people of God, *are like goads*, to prick us up and by sharp reproofs and admonitions to awak our drowsy, drossie and sluggish nature to attention & holy practice.

Second, confirming and establishing us in goodness that we be not wavering minded, and unconstant hearted to fall alway: In which respect it is compared to nails that fasten things together, or stakes wherewith shepherds short up the hurdles to their folds to keep their sheep in. *And as nails*, such are the strong promsies and threatenings of the word, *fastened*, driven home to the head, or deep in the ground, *ie.,* throughly applied to the hearts of the people, *by the master of the assemblies, i.e.,* by ministers who are rules and teachers of the congregations of God's people, *verse 11.*

Others expound this last clause otherwise, making a several argument of commentation of the word, that the Scriptures are words choicely and excellently collected together, as no writing can be compared to them, alluding to the custome of epitomising and collecting the sermosn of the prophets and the histories fo the Bible into one volume by men inspired by the Holy Ghost.

#### **Argument Four: Divine Source**

From the author of this and other Holy Writ, which however it be delivered by inferior shepherds and ministers of the Church, it is not their word, but is given and inspired in them by that great and One Pastor, Jesus Christ, who by his Spirit spake in the prophets and holy men. And therefore, this book is to be heeded, not as Solomon's but as God's word, *verse 11.*

#### ***Second Argument: Other Books are Vain***

The second kind of argument is from the fruitlessness and vanity of other books and studies which men make & betake themselves to wanting supernatural directions. The vanity is double:

In making of books, proved from the multitude of them: It must needs be that men's writings should give no full satisfaction, seeing no man thinks another has written so well, but that he may be amended, confuted, something distracted, and one or other corrected. Whence, every day new books and new discourses of one and the same subject: And thus whilst all will be still writing, it argues that all their writings are imperfect and full of vanity: for he that comes last and sees and reads all will yet make a new book more. Therefore, it is good to study the Scriptures, which are perfect and complete declarations of matters that are fully to satisfy our inquiries. *In making many books there is no end* true of all times, especially in these days which hath infinite numbers of books and few to any purpose.

In reading and studying of these books here censured to be wearisome, because a fruitless labor. It dulls the spirits, wearies the body, spends the time, but brings no satisfactory

knowledge. *Much reading is a weariness to the flesh.* Wherefore seeing we have the Scriptures in not so many nor so large volumes as the reading need weary us out, yet so perfect and entire as they are able to make us wise to salvation, let us bestow thereon principally our pains and study, verse 12.

## CONCLUSION PART 2: ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14

Here we have the final word on happiness: Obey God and keep his commands. Or, as the Shorter Catechism says, “Glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

### TEXT:

*13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

### COMMENTARY:

So much of the first conclusion, the second follows:

Touching the right means of true happiness in this world, treated of in the latter part of this book, the sum whereof and of this whole book is, that man’s perfect happiness so much sought after, stands only in the fear of God, and obedience of his commandments *Let us hear is the conclusion of the whole matter*, touching this inquiry after true happiness, *fear God*, that is the first part and the root, *and keep his commandments*, this is the second part of blessedness and a fruit of the former, and in these two stands man’s whole duty, man’s whole happiness, *For this is the whole duty of man, verse 14.*

Which that we may do, Solomon adds a strong motive, from the judgment and sentence that God will pass upon all the actions of men, whether for the

Manner	Open Secret
Matter	Good, or Evil

All must come under his strict examination and severe censure, *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil, verse 15.*