

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The inscription, or title of the book (v. 1).
- II.** The general doctrine of the vanity of the creature laid down (v. 2) and explained (v. 3).
- III.** The proof of this doctrine, taken,
 - 1.** From the shortness of human life and the multitude of births and burials in this life (v. 4).
 - 2.** From the inconstant nature, and constant revolutions, of all the creatures, and the perpetual flux and reflux they are in, the sun, wind, and water (v. 5-7).
 - 3.** From the abundant toil man has about them and the little satisfaction he has in them (v. 8).
 - 4.** From the return of the same things again, which shows the end of all perfection, and that the stock is exhausted (v. 9, 10).
 - 5.** From the oblivion to which all things are condemned (v. 11).
- IV.** The first instance of the vanity of man's knowledge, and all the parts of learning, especially natural philosophy and politics. Observe,
 - 1.** The trial Solomon made of these (v. 12, 13, 16, 17).
 - 2.** His judgment of them, that all is vanity (v. 14). For,
 - (1.)** There is labour in getting knowledge (v. 13).
 - (2.)** There is little good to be done with it (v. 15).
 - (3.)** There is no satisfaction in it (v. 18). And, if this is vanity and vexation, all other things in this world, being much inferior to it in dignity and worth, must needs be so too. A great scholar cannot be happy unless he be a true saint.

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-3

THE VANITY OF THE WORLD

Here is,

I. An account of the penman of this book; it was Solomon, for no other son of David was king of Jerusalem; but he conceals his name *Solomon*, *peaceable*, because by his sin he had brought trouble upon himself and his kingdom, had broken his peace with God and lost the peace of his conscience, and therefore was no more worthy of that name. Call me not *Solomon*, call me *Marah*, for, *behold, for peace I had great bitterness*. But he calls himself,

1. *The preacher*, which intimates his present character. He is *Koheleth*, which comes from a word which signifies *to gather*; but it is of a feminine termination, by which perhaps Solomon intends to upbraid himself with his effeminacy, which contributed more than any thing to his apostasy; for it was to please his wives that he set up idols, ^{443B}Nehemiah 13:26. Or the word *soul* must be understood, and so *Koheleth* is,

(1.) A *penitent soul*, or one *gathered*, one that had rambled and gone astray like a lost sheep, but was now reduced, gathered in from his wanderings, gathered home to his duty, and come at length to himself. The spirit that was dissipated after a thousand vanities is now collected and made to centre in God. Divine grace can make great sinners great converts, and renew even those to repentance who, *after they had known the way of righteousness, turned aside from it, and heal their backslidings*, though it is a difficult case. It is only the penitent soul that God will accept, the heart that is broken, not the head that is bowed down like a bulrush only for a day, David's repentance, not Ahab's. And it is only the gathered soul that is the penitent soul, that comes back from its by-paths, that no longer *scatters its way to the strangers* (^{243B}Jeremiah 3:13), but is *united to fear God's name*. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak*, and therefore we have here the words of the penitent, and those published. If eminent professors of religion fall into gross sin, they are concerned, for the honour of God and the repairing of the damage they have done to his kingdom, openly to testify their repentance, that the antidote may be administered as extensively as the poison.

(2.) A *preaching soul*, or one *gathering*. Being himself *gathered* to the congregation of saints, out of which he had by his sin thrown himself, and being reconciled to the church, he endeavours to gather others to it that had gone astray like him, and perhaps were led astray by his example. He that has done any thing to seduce his brother ought to do all he can to restore him. Perhaps Solomon called together a congregation of his

people, as he had done at the dedication of the temple (^{<188E>}1 Kings 8:2), so now at the rededicating of himself. In that assembly he presided as the people's mouth to God in prayer (v. 12); in this as God's mouth to them in preaching. God by his Spirit made him a preacher, in token of his being reconciled to him; a commission is a tacit pardon. Christ sufficiently testifies his forgiving Peter by committing his lambs and sheep to his trust. Observe, Penitents should be preachers; those that have taken warning themselves to turn and live should give warning to others not to go on and die. *When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.* Preachers must be preaching *souls*, for that only is likely to reach to the heart that comes from the heart. Paul served God *with his spirit in the gospel of his Son*, ^{<40D>}Romans 1:9.

2. The son of David. His taking this title intimates,

(1.) That he looked upon it as a great honour to be the son of so good a man, and valued himself very much upon it.

(2.) That he also looked upon it as a great aggravation of his sin that he had such a father, who had given him a good education and put up many a good prayer for him; it cuts him to the heart to think that he should be a blemish and disgrace to the name and family of such a one as David. It aggravated the sin of Jehoiakim that he was the son of Josiah, ^{<225>}Jeremiah 22:15-17.

(3.) That his being the son of David encouraged him to repent and hope for mercy, for David had fallen into sin, by which he should have been warned not to sin, but was not; but David repented, and therein he took example from him and found mercy as he did. Yet this was not all; he was that son of David concerning whom God had said that though he would *chasten his transgression with the rod*, yet he would not *break his covenant* with him, ^{<188B>}Psalms 89:34. Christ, the great preacher, was the *Son of David*.

3. King of Jerusalem. This he mentions,

(1.) As that which was a very great aggravation of his sin. He was a king. God had done much for him, in raising him to the throne, and yet he had so ill requited him; his dignity made the bad example and influence of his sin the more dangerous, and many would follow his pernicious ways; especially as he was king of Jerusalem, the holy city, where God's temple

was, and of his own building too, where the priests, the Lord's ministers, were, and his prophets who had taught him better things.

(2.) As that which might give some advantage to what he wrote, for *where the word of a king is there is power*. He thought it no disparagement to him, as a king, to be a preacher; but the people would regard him the more as a preacher because he was a king. If men of honour would lay out themselves to do good, what a great deal of good might they do! Solomon looked as great in the pulpit, preaching the vanity of the world, as in his throne of ivory, judging.

The Chaldee-paraphrase (which, in this book, makes very large additions to the text, or comments upon it, all along) gives this account of Solomon's writing this book, That by the spirit of prophecy he foresaw the revolt of the ten tribes from his son, and, in process of time, the destruction of Jerusalem and the house of the sanctuary, and the captivity of the people, in the foresight of which he said, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; and to that he applies many passages in this book.

II. The general scope and design of the book. What is it that this royal preacher has to say? That which he aims at is, for the making of us truly religious, to take down our esteem of and expectation from the things of this world. In order to this, he shows,

1. That they are *all vanity*, v. 2. This is the proposition he lays down and undertakes to prove: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*. It was no new text; his father David had more than once spoken to the same purport. The truth itself here asserted is, that *all is vanity*, all besides God and considered as abstract from him, the *all* of this world, all worldly employments and enjoyments, the *all that is in the world* (⁶¹⁹⁶1 John 2:16), all that which is agreeable to our senses and to our fancies in this present state, which gains pleasure to ourselves or reputation with others. It is *all vanity*, not only in the abuse of it, when it is perverted by the sin of man, but even in the use of it. Man, considered with reference to these things, is vanity (³⁹⁰⁵Psalm 39:5, 6), and, if there were not another life after this, were made in vain (³⁹⁴⁷Psalm 89:47); and those things, considered in reference to man (whatever they are in themselves), are *vanity*. They are impertinent to the soul, foreign, and add nothing to it; they do not answer the end, nor yield any true satisfaction; they are uncertain in their continuance, are fading, and perishing, and passing away, and will certainly deceive and disappoint

those that put a confidence in them. Let us not therefore *love vanity* (^{<4042>}Psalm 4:2), nor *lift up our souls* to it (^{<4244>}Psalm 24:4), for we shall but weary ourselves for it, ^{<3023>}Hebrews 2:13. It is expressed here very emphatically; not only, *All is vain*, but in the abstract, *All is vanity*; as if vanity were the *proprium quarto modo* — *property in the fourth mode*, of the things of this world, that which enters into the nature of them. The are not only *vanity*, but *vanity of vanities*, the vainest vanity, vanity in the highest degree, nothing but vanity, such a vanity as is the cause of a great deal of vanity. And this is redoubled, because the thing is certain and past dispute, it is *vanity of vanities*. This intimates that the wise man had his own heart fully convinced of and much affected with this truth, and that he was very desirous that others should be convinced of it and affected with it, as he was, but that he found the generality of men very loth to believe it and consider it (^{<3314>}Job 33:14); it intimates likewise that we cannot comprehend and express the vanity of this world. But who is it that speaks thus slightly of the world? Is it one that will stand to what he says? Yes, he puts his name to it — *saith the preacher*. Is it one that was a competent judge? Yes, as much as ever any man was. Many speak contemptuously of the world because they are hermits, and know it not, or beggars, and have it not; but Solomon knew it. He had dived into nature's depths (^{<1063>}1 Kings 4:33), and he had it, more of it perhaps than ever any man had, his head filled with its notions and *his belly* with its *hidden treasures* (^{<4974>}Psalm 17:14), and he passes this judgment on it. But did he speak as one having authority? Yes, not only that of a king, but that of a prophet, a preacher; he spoke in God's name, and was divinely inspired to say it. But did he not say it in his haste, or in a passion, upon occasion of some particular disappointment? No; he said it deliberately, said it and proved it, laid it down as a fundamental principle, on which he grounded the necessity of being religious. And, as some think, one main thing he designed was to show that the everlasting throne and kingdom which God had by Nathan promised to David and his seed must be of another world; for all things in this world are subject to vanity, and therefore have not in them sufficient to answer the extent of that promise. If Solomon find all to be vanity, then the kingdom of the Messiah must come, in which we shall inherit substance.

2. That they are insufficient to make us happy. And for this he appeals to men's consciences: *What profit has a man of all the pains he takes?* v. 3. Observe here,

(1.) The business of this world described. It is *labour*; the word signifies both care and toil. It is work that wearies men. There is a constant fatigue in worldly business. It is *labour under the sun*; that is a phrase peculiar to this book, where we meet with it twenty-eight times. There is a world above the sun, a world which needs not the sun, for the glory of God is its light, where there is work without labour and with great profit, the work of angels; but he speaks of the work *under the sun*, the pains of which are great and the gains little. It is *under the sun*, under the influence of the sun, by its light and in its heat; as we have the benefit of the light of the day, so we have sometimes the burden and heat of the day (^{<4112>}Matthew 20:12), and therefore *in the sweat of our face we eat bread*. In the dark and cold grave the weary are at rest.

(2.) The benefit of that business enquired into: *What profit has a man of all that labour?* Solomon says (^{<4123>}Proverbs 14:23), *In all labour there is profit*; and yet here he denies that there is any profit. As to our present condition in the world, it is true that by labour we get that which we call *profit*; we *eat the labour of our hands*; but as the wealth of the world is commonly called *substance*, and yet it is *that which is not* (^{<4125>}Proverbs 22:5), so it is called *profit*, but the question is whether it be really so or no. And here he determines that it is not, that it is not a real benefit, that it is not a remaining benefit. In short, the wealth and pleasure of this world, if we had ever so much of them, are not sufficient to make us happy, nor will they be a portion for us.

[1.] As to the body, and the life that now is, *What profit has a man of all his labour? A man's life consists not in an abundance*, ^{<4125>}Luke 12:15. As goods are increased care about them is increased, and *those are increased that eat of them*, and a little thing will embitter all the comfort of them; and then *what profit has a man of all his labour?* Early up, and never the nearer.

[2.] As to the soul, and the life that is to come, we may much more truly say, *What profit has a man of all his labour?* All he gets by it will not supply the wants of the soul, nor satisfy its desires, will not atone for the sin of the soul, nor cure its diseases, nor contravail the loss of it; what profit will they be of to the soul in death, in judgment, or in the everlasting state? The fruit of our labour in heavenly things is *meat that endures to eternal life*, but the fruit of our labour for the world is only *meat that perishes*.

~~200~~ ECCLESIASTES 1:4-8

THE VANITY OF THE WORLD

To prove the vanity of all things under the sun, and their insufficiency to make us happy, Solomon here shows,

1. That the time of our enjoyment of these things is very short, and only while we *accomplish as a hireling his day*. We continue in the world but for one generation, which is continually passing away to make room for another, and we are passing with it. Our worldly possessions we very lately had from others, and must very shortly leave to others, and therefore to us they are vanity; they can be no more substantial than that life which is the *substratum* of them, and that is but a *vapour, which appears for a little while and then vanishes away*. While the stream of mankind is continually flowing, how little enjoyment has one drop of that stream of the pleasant banks between which it glides! We may give God the glory of that constant succession of generations, in which the world has hitherto had its existence, and will have to the end of time, admitting his patience in continuing that sinful species and his power in continuing that dying species. We may be also quickened to do the work of our generation diligently, and serve it faithfully, because it will be over shortly; and, in concern for mankind in general, we should consult the welfare of succeeding generations; but as to our own happiness, let us not expect it within such narrow limits, but in an eternal rest and consistency.

2. That when we leave this world we leave the earth behind us, that *abides for ever* where it is, and therefore the things of the earth can stand us in no stead in the future state. It is well for mankind in general that the earth endures to the end of time, when it and all the works in it shall be burnt up; but what is that to particular persons, when they remove to the world of spirits? **3.** That the condition of man is, in this respect, worse than that even of the inferior creatures: *The earth abides for ever*, but man abides upon the earth but a little while. The sun sets indeed every night, yet it rises again in the morning, as bright and fresh as ever; the winds, though they shift their point, yet in some point or other still they are; the waters that go to the sea above ground come from it again under ground. *But man lies down and rises not,* ~~840~~ Job 14:7, 12.

4. That all things in this world are movable and mutable, and subject to a continual toil and agitation, constant in nothing but inconstancy, still going, never resting; it was but once that the sun stood still; when it is risen it is hastening to set, and, when it is set, hastening to rise again (v. 5); the winds are ever and anon shifting (v. 6), and the waters in a continual circulation (v. 7), it would be of as bad consequence for them to stagnate as for the blood in the body to do so. And can we expect rest in a world where all things are thus full of labour (v. 8), on a sea that is always ebbing and flowing, and her waves continually working and rolling? 5. That though all things are still in motion, yet they are still where they were; The sun *parts* (as it is in the margin), but it is to the same place; the wind turns till it comes to the same place, and so the waters return to the place whence they came. Thus man, after all the pains he takes to find satisfaction and happiness in the creature, is but where he was, still as far to seek as ever. Man's mind is as restless in its pursuits as the sun, and wind, and rivers, but never satisfied, never contented; the more it has of the world the more it would have; and it would be no sooner filled with the streams of outward prosperity, the brooks of *honey and butter* (⁴⁸¹⁷Job 20:17), than the sea is with *all the rivers that run into it*; it is still as it was, *a troubled sea that cannot rest*.

6. That *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*, ⁴⁸¹⁸2 Peter 3:4. The earth is where it was; the sun, and winds, and rivers, keep the same course that ever they did; and therefore, if they have never yet been sufficient to make a happiness for man, they are never likely to be so, for they can but yield the same comfort that they have yielded. We must therefore look above the sun for satisfaction, and for a new world.

7. That this world is, at the best, a weary land: *All is vanity*, for all is *full of labour*. The whole creation is made subject to this vanity ever since man was sentenced to *eat bread in the sweat of his brows*. If we survey the whole creation, we shall see all busy; all have enough to do to mind their own business; none will be a portion or happiness for man; all labour to serve him, but none prove a *help-meet* for him. Man cannot express how full of labour all things are, can neither number the laborious nor measure the labours.

8. That our senses are unsatisfied, and the objects of them unsatisfying. He specifies those senses that perform their office with least toil, and are most

capable of being pleased: *The eye is not satisfied with seeing*, but is weary of seeing always the same sight, and covets novelty and variety. *The ear* is fond, at first, of a pleasant song or tune, but soon nauseates it, and must have another; both are surfeited, but neither satiated, and what was most grateful becomes ungrateful. Curiosity is still inquisitive, because still unsatisfied, and the more it is humoured the more nice and peevish it grows, crying, *Give, give*.

~~210~~ ECCLESIASTES 1:9-11

CHANGE WITHOUT NOVELTY

Two things we are apt to take a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction in, and value ourselves upon, with reference to our business and enjoyments in the world, as if they helped to save them from vanity. Solomon shows us our mistake in both.

1. The novelty of the invention, that it is such as was never known before. How grateful is it to think that none ever made such advances in knowledge, and such discoveries by it, as we, that none ever made such improvements of an estate or trade, and had the art of enjoying the gains of it, as we have. Their contrivances and compositions are all despised and run down, and we boast of new fashions, new hypotheses, new methods, new expressions, which jostle out the old, and put them down. But this is all a mistake: *The thing that is, and shall be, is the same with that which has been, and that which shall be done will be but the same with that which is done, for there is no new thing under the sun*, v. 9. It is repeated (v. 10) by way of question, *is there any thing of which it may be said*, with wonder, *See, this is new; there never was the like?* It is an appeal to observing men, and a challenge to those that cry up modern learning above that of the ancients. Let them name any thing which they take to be new, and though perhaps we cannot make it to appear, for want of the records of former times, yet we have reason to conclude *that it has been already of old time, which was before us*. What is there in the kingdom of nature of which we may say, *This is new? The works were finished from the foundation of the world* (~~204B~~ Hebrews 4:3); things which appear new to us, as they do to children, are not so in themselves. The heavens were *of old*; the earth abides for ever; the powers of nature and the links of natural

causes are still the same that ever they were. In the kingdom of Providence, though the course and method of it have not such known and certain rules as that of nature, nor does it go always in the same track, yet, in the general, it is still the same thing over and over again. Men's hearts, and the corruptions of them, are still the same; their desires, and pursuits, and complaints, are still the same; and what God does in his dealings with men is according to the scripture, according to the manner, so that it is all repetition. What is surprising to us needs not be so, for there has been the like, the like strange advancements and disappointments, the like strange revolutions and sudden turns, sudden turns of affairs; the miseries of human life have always been much the same, and mankind tread a perpetual round, and, as the sun and wind, are but where they were. Now the design of this is,

(1.) To show the folly of the children of men in affecting things that are new, in imagining that they have discovered such things, and in pleasing and priding themselves in them. We are apt to nauseate old things, and to grow weary of what we have been long used to, as Israel of the manna, and covet, with the Athenians, still to tell and hear of some new thing, and admire this and the other as new, whereas it is all what has been. Tatianus the Assyrian, showing the Grecians how all the arts which they valued themselves upon owed their original to those nations which they counted barbarous, thus reasons with them: “For shame, do not call those things *eureseis* — *inventions*, which are but *mimeseis* — *imitations*.”

(2.) To take us off from expecting happiness or satisfaction in the creature. Why should we look for it there, where never any yet have found it? What reason have we to think that the world should be any kinder to us than it has been to those that have gone before us, since there is nothing in it that is new, and our predecessors have made as much of it as could be made? *Your fathers did eat manna, and yet they are dead.* See ^{<418>}John 8:8, 9; 6:49.

(3.) To quicken us to secure spiritual and eternal blessings. If we would be entertained with new things, we must acquaint ourselves with the things of God, get a new nature; then *old things pass away, and all things become new*, ^{<417>}2 Corinthians 5:17. The gospel puts *a new song into our mouths*. In heaven *all is new* (^{<415>}Revelation 21:5), all new at first, wholly unlike the present state of things, a new world indeed (^{<415>}Luke 20:35), and all new to eternity, always fresh, always flourishing. This consideration

should make us willing to die, That in this world there is nothing but the same over and over again, and we can expect nothing from it more or better than we have had.

2. The memorableness of the achievement, that it is such as will be known and talked of hereafter. Many think they have found satisfaction enough in this, that their names shall be perpetuated, that posterity will celebrate the actions they have performed, the honours they have won, and the estates they have raised, that *their houses shall continue for ever* (~~Psalm~~ Psalm 49:11); but herein they deceive themselves. How many *former things* and persons were there, which in their day looked very great and made a mighty figure, and yet *there is no remembrance* of them; they are buried in oblivion. Here and there one person or action that was remarkable met with a kind historian, and had the good hap to be recorded, when at the same time there were others, no less remarkable, that were dropped: and therefore we may conclude that *neither shall there be any remembrance of things to come*, but that which we hope to be remembered by will be either lost or slighted.

~~2012~~ ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18

VANITY OF HUMAN WISDOM

Solomon, having asserted in general that *all is vanity*, and having given some general proofs of it, now takes the most effectual method to evince the truth of it,

- 1.** By his own experience; he tried them all, and found them vanity.
- 2.** By an induction of particulars; and here he begins with that which bids fairest of all to be the happiness of a reasonable creature, and that is knowledge and learning; if this be vanity, every thing else must needs be so. Now as to this,
I. Solomon tells us here what trial he had made of it, and that with such advantages that, if true satisfaction could have been found in it, he would have found it.

1. His high station gave him an opportunity of improving himself in all parts of learning, and particularly in politics and the conduct of human

affairs, v. 12. He that is *the preacher* of this doctrine *was king over Israel*, whom all their neighbours admired as *a wise and understanding people*, ¹⁰⁰⁶Deuteronomy 4:6. He had his royal seat *in Jerusalem*, which then deserved, better than Athens ever did, to be called *the eye of the world*. The heart of a king is unsearchable; he has reaches of his own, and *a divine sentence is often in his lips*. It is his honour, it is his business, to search out every matter. Solomon's great wealth and honour put him into a capacity of making his court the centre of learning and the rendezvous of learned men, of furnishing himself with the best of books, and either conversing or corresponding with all the wise and knowing part of mankind then in being, who made application to him to learn of him, by which he could not but improve himself; for it is in knowledge as it is in trade, all the profit is by barter and exchange; if we have that to say which will instruct others, they will have that to say which will instruct us. Some observe how slightly Solomon speaks of his dignity and honour. He does not say, *I the preacher am king*, but *I was king*, no matter what I am. He speaks of it as a thing past, because worldly honours are transitory.

2. He applied himself to the improvement of these advantages, and the opportunities he had of getting wisdom, which, though ever so great, will not make a man wise unless he give his mind to it. Solomon *gave his heart to seek and search out* all things to be known *by wisdom*, v. 13. He made it his business to acquaint himself with *all the things that are done under the sun*, that are done by the providence of God or by the art and prudence of man. He set himself to get all the insight he could into philosophy and mathematics, into husbandry and trade, merchandise and mechanics, into the history of former ages and the present state of other kingdoms, their laws, customs, and policies, into men's different tempers, capacities, and projects, and the methods of managing them; he set himself not only to seek, but to search, to pry into, that which is most intricate, and which requires the closes application of mind and the most vigorous and constant prosecution. Though he was a prince, he made himself a drudge to learning, was not discouraged by its knots, nor took up short of its depths. And this he did, not merely to gratify his own genius, but to qualify himself for the service of God, and his generation, and to make an experiment how far the enlargement of the knowledge would go towards the settlement and repose of the mind.

3. He made a very great progress in his studies, wonderfully improved all the parts of learning, and carried his discoveries much further than any that

had been before him. He did not condemn learning, as many do, because they cannot conquer it and will not be at the pains to make themselves masters of it; no, what he aimed at he compassed; he *saw all the works that were done under the sun* (v. 14), works of nature in the upper and lower world, all within this vortex (to use the modern gibberish) which has the sun for its centre, works of art, the product of men's wit, in a personal or social capacity. he had as much satisfaction in the success of his searches as ever any man had; he *communed with his own heart* concerning his attainments in knowledge, with as much pleasure as ever any rich merchant had in taking account of his stock. He could say, "*Lo, I have magnified and increased wisdom, have not only gotten more of it myself, but have done more to propagate it and bring it into reputation, than any, than all that have been before me in Jerusalem.*" Note, It becomes great men to be studious, and delight themselves most in intellectual pleasures. Where God gives great advantages of getting knowledge he expects improvements accordingly. It is happy with a people when their princes and noblemen study to excel others as much in wisdom and useful knowledge as they do in honour and estate; and they may do that service to the commonwealth of learning by applying themselves to the studies that are proper for them which meaner persons cannot do. Solomon must be acknowledged as competent judge of this matter, for he had not only got his head full of notions, but his *heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge*, of the power and benefit of knowledge, as well as the amusement and entertainment of it; what he knew he had digested, and knew how to make use of. *Wisdom entered into his heart*, and so became *pleasant to his soul*, ~~300~~ Proverbs 2:10, 11; 22:18.

4. He applied his studies especially to that part of learning which is most serviceable to the conduct of human life, and consequently is the most valuable (v. 17): "*I gave my heart to know the rules and dictates of wisdom, and how I might obtain it; and to know madness and folly, how I might prevent and cure it, to know the snares and insinuations of it, that I might avoid them, and guard against them, and discover its fallacies.*" So industrious was Solomon to improve himself in knowledge that he gained instruction both by the wisdom of prudent men and by the madness of foolish men, by *the field of the slothful*, as well as of *the diligent*.

II. He tells us what was the result of this trial, to confirm what he had said, that *all is vanity*.

1. He found that his searches after knowledge were very toilsome, and a weariness not only to the flesh, but to the mind (v. 13): *This sore travail*, this difficulty that there is in searching after truth and finding it, *God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted therewith*, as a punishment for our first parents' coveting forbidden knowledge. As bread for the body, so that for the soul, must be got and eaten *in the sweat of our face*, whereas both would have been had without labour if Adam had not sinned.

2. He found that the more he saw of *the works done under the sun* the more he saw of their vanity; nay, and the sight often occasioned him *vexation of spirit* (v. 14): “*I have seen all the works of a world full of business, have observed what the children of men are doing; and behold, whatever men think of their own works, I see all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*” He had before pronounced all *vanity* (v. 2), needless and unprofitable, and that which does us no good; here he adds, It is all *vexation of spirit*, troublesome and prejudicial, and that which does us hurt. It is *feeding upon wind*; so some read it, ~~311~~ Hosea 12:1.

(1.) The works themselves which we see done are *vanity and vexation* to those that are employed in them. There is so much care in the contrivance of our worldly business, so much toil in the prosecution of it, and so much trouble in the disappointments we meet with in it, that we may well say, It is *vexation of spirit*.

(2.) The sight of them is *vanity and vexation of spirit* to the wise observer of them. The more we see of the world the more we see to make us uneasy, and, with Heraclitus, to look upon all with weeping eyes. Solomon especially perceived that the knowledge of *wisdom and folly* was *vexation of spirit*, v. 17. It vexed him to see many that had wisdom not use it, and many that had folly not strive against it. It vexed him when he knew wisdom to see how far off it stood from the children of men, and, when he saw folly, to see how fast it was bound in their hearts.

3. He found that when he had got some knowledge he could neither gain that satisfaction to himself nor do that good to others with it which he expected, v. 15. It would not avail,

(1.) To redress the many grievances of human life: “After all, I find that *that which is crooked* will be crooked still and *cannot be made straight.*” Our knowledge is itself intricate and perplexed; we must go far about and fetch a great compass to come at it. Solomon thought to find out a nearer way to it, but he could not. The paths of learning are as much a labyrinth

as ever they were. The minds and manners of men are crooked and perverse. Solomon thought, with his wisdom and power together, thoroughly to reform his kingdom, and make that straight which he found crooked; but he was disappointed. All the philosophy and politics in the world will not restore the corrupt nature of man to its primitive rectitude; we find the insufficiency of them both in others and in ourselves. Learning will not alter men's natural tempers, nor cure them of their sinful distempers; nor will it change the constitution of things in this world; a vale of tears it is and so it will be when all is done.

(2.) To make up the many deficiencies in the comfort of human life: *That which is wanting* there *cannot be numbered*, or counted out to us from the treasures of human learning, but what *is wanting* will still be so. All our enjoyments here, when we have done our utmost to bring them to perfection, are still lame and defective, and it cannot be helped; as they are, so they are likely to be. *That which is wanting* in our knowledge is so much that it *cannot be numbered*. The more we know the more we see of our own ignorance. *Who can understand his errors, his defects?*

4. Upon the whole, therefore, he concluded that great scholars do but make themselves great mourners; *for in much wisdom is much grief*, v. 18. There must be a great deal of pains taken to get it, and a great deal of care not to forget it; the more we know the more we see there is to be known, and consequently we perceive with greater clearness that our work is without end, and the more we see of our former mistakes and blunders, which occasions *much grief*. The more we see of men's different sentiments and opinions (and it is that which a great deal of our learning is conversant about) the more at a loss we are, it may be, which is in the right. Those *that increase knowledge* have so much the more quick and sensible perception of the calamities of this world, and for one discovery they make that is pleasing, perhaps, they make ten that are displeasing, and so they *increase sorrow*. Let us not therefore be driven off from the pursuit of any useful knowledge, but put on patience to break through the sorrow of it; but let us despair of finding true happiness in this knowledge, and expect it only in the knowledge of God and the careful discharge of our duty to him. *He that increases* in heavenly wisdom, and in an experimental acquaintance with the principles, powers, and pleasures of the spiritual and divine life, *increases joy*, such as will shortly be consummated in everlasting joy.