

# CHAPTER 5

Solomon, in this chapter, discourses,

**I.** Concerning the worship of God, prescribing that as a remedy against all those vanities which he had already observed to be in wisdom, learning, pleasure, honour, power, and business. That we may not be deceived by those things, nor have our spirits vexed with the disappointments we meet with in them, let us make conscience of our duty to God and keep up our communion with him; but, withal, he gives a necessary caution against the vanities which are to often found in religious exercises, which deprive them of their excellency and render them unable to help against other vanities. If our religion be a vain religion, how great is that vanity! Let us therefore take heed of vanity,

1. In hearing the word, and offering sacrifice (v. 1).
2. In prayer (v. 2, 3).
3. In making vows (v. 4-6).
4. In pretending to divine dreams (v. 7). Now,
  - (1.) For a remedy against those vanities, he prescribes the fear of God (v. 7).
  - (2.) To prevent the offence that might arise from the present sufferings of good people, he directs us to look up to God (v. 8).

**II.** Concerning the wealth of this world and the vanity and vexation that attend it. The fruits of the earth indeed are necessary to the support of life (v. 9), but as for silver, and gold, and riches,

1. They are unsatisfying (v. 10).
2. They are unprofitable (v. 11).
3. They are disquieting (v. 12).
4. They often prove hurtful and destroying (v. 13).
5. They are perishing (v. 14).
6. They must be left behind when we die (v. 15, 16).
7. If we have not a heart to make use of them, they occasion a great deal of uneasiness (v. 17). And therefore he recommends to us the comfortable use of that which God has given us, with an eye to him that is the giver, as the best way both to answer

the end of our having it and to obviate the mischiefs that commonly attend great estates (v. 18-20). So that if we can but learn out of this chapter how to manage the business of religion, and the business of this world (which two take up most of our time), so that both may turn to a good account, and neither our sabbath days nor our week-days may be lost, we shall have reason to say, We have learned two good lessons.

## ⌘ ECCLESIASTES 5:1-3

### A CAUTION TO WORSHIPPERS

Solomon's design, in driving us off from the world, by showing us its vanity, is to drive us to God and to our duty, that we may not walk in the way of the world, but by religious rules, nor depend upon the wealth of the world, but on religious advantages; and therefore,

**I.** He here sends us to *the house of God*, to the place of public worship, to the temple, which he himself had built at a vast expense. When he reflected with regret on all his other works (⌘ Ecclesiastes 2:4), he did not repent of that, but reflected on it with pleasure, yet mentions it not, lest he should seem to reflect on it with pride; but he here sends those to it that would know more of the vanity of the world and would find that happiness which is in vain sought for in the creature. David, when he was perplexed, *went into the sanctuary of God*, ⌘ Psalm 73:17. Let our disappointments in the creature turn our eyes to the Creator; let us have recourse to the word of God's grace and consult that, to the throne of his grace and solicit that. In the word and prayer there is a balm for every wound.

**II.** He charges us to behave ourselves well there, that we may not miss of our end in coming thither. Religious exercises are not vain things, but, if we mismanage them, they become vain to us. And therefore,

**1.** We must address ourselves to them with all possible seriousness and care: "*Keep thy foot*, not keep it back from the house of God (as ⌘ Proverbs 25:17), nor go slowly thither, as one unwilling to draw nigh to God, but *look well to thy goings, ponder the path of thy feet*, lest thou take a false step. Address thyself to the worship of God with a solemn pause, and take time to compose thyself for it, not going about it with precipitation, which is called *hasting with the feet*, ⌘ Proverbs 19:2. Keep thy thoughts from roving and wandering from the work; keep thy

affections from running out towards wrong objects, for in the business of God's house there is work enough for the whole man, and all too little to be employed." Some think it alludes to the charge given to Moses and Joshua to *put off their shoes* (<sup><185></sup>Exodus 3:5, <sup><185></sup>Joshua 5:15,) in token of subjection and reverence. *Keep thy feet clean,* <sup><185></sup>Exodus 30:19.

**2.** We must take heed that the sacrifice we bring be not *the sacrifice of fools* (of wicked men), for they are fools and their *sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord,* <sup><185></sup>Proverbs 15:8), that we bring not *the torn, and the lame, and the sick for sacrifice*, for we are plainly told that it will not be accepted, and therefore it is folly to bring it, — that we rest not in the sign and ceremony, and the outside of the performance, without regarding the sense and meaning of it, for that is the *sacrifice of fools*. Bodily exercise, if that be all, is a jest; none but fools will think thus to please him who is a Spirit and requires the heart, and they will see their folly when they find what a great deal of pains they have taken to no purpose for want of sincerity. They are *fools*, for they *consider not that they do evil*; they think they are doing God and themselves good service when really they are putting a great affront upon God and a great cheat upon their own souls by their hypocritical devotions. Men may be doing evil even when they profess to be doing good, and even when they do not know it, when they do not consider it. *They know not but to do evil*, so some read it. Wicked minds cannot choose but sin, even in the acts of devotion. Or, They *consider not that they do evil*; they act at a venture, right or wrong, pleasing to God or not, it is all one to them.

**3.** That we may not bring *the sacrifice of fools*, we must come to God's house with hearts disposed to know and do our duty. We must be *ready to hear*, that is,

**(1.)** We must diligently *attend* to the word of God read and preached. "*Be swift to hear* the exposition which the priests give of the sacrifices, declaring the intent and meaning of them, and do not think it enough to gaze upon what they do, for it must be *a reasonable service*, otherwise it is *the sacrifice of fools*."

**(2.)** We must resolve to comply with the will of God as it is made known to us. *Hearing* is often put for *obeying*, and that is it that is *better than sacrifice*, <sup><185></sup>1 Samuel 15:22; <sup><215></sup>Isaiah 1:15, 16. We come in a right frame to holy duties when we come with this upon our heart, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears. Let the word of the Lord come* (said a good man), *and if I had 600 necks I would bow them all to the authority of it.*

**4.** We must be very cautious and considerate in all our approaches and addresses to God (v. 2): *Be not rash with thy mouth*, in making prayers, or protestations, or promises; *let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God*. Note,

(1.) When we are in the *house of God*, in solemn assemblies for religious worship, we are in a special manner before God and in his presence, there where he has promised to meet his people, where his eye is upon us and ours ought to be unto him.

(2.) We have something to say, something to utter before God, when we *draw nigh to him* in holy duties; he is one *with whom we have to do*, with whom we have business of vast importance. If we come without an errand, we shall go away without any advantage.

(3.) What we *utter before God* must come from *the heart*, and therefore we must not be *rash with our mouth*, never let our tongue outrun our thoughts in our devotions; the *words of our mouth*, must always be the product of the *meditation of our hearts*. Thoughts are words to God, and words are but wind if they be not copied from the thoughts. Lip-labour, though ever so well laboured, if that be all, is but lost labour in religion, <sup><468></sup>Matthew 15:8, 9.

(4.) It is not enough that what we say comes from the heart, but it must come from a composed heart, and not from a sudden heat or passion. As the mouth must not be rash, so the heart must not be hasty; we must not only think, but think twice, before we speak, when we are to speak either from God in preaching or to God in prayer, and not utter any thing indecent and undigested, <sup><445></sup>1 Corinthians 14:15.

**5.** We must be sparing of our words in the presence of God, that is, we must be reverent and deliberate, not talk to God as boldly and carelessly as we do to one another, not speak what comes uppermost, not repeat things over and over, as we do to one another, that what we say may be understood and remembered and may make impression; no, when we speak to God we must consider,

(1.) That between him and us there is an infinite distance: *God is in heaven*, where he reigns in glory over us and all the children of men, where he is attended with an innumerable company of holy angels and is *far exalted above all our blessing and praise*. *We are on earth*, the

footstool of his throne; we are mean and vile, unlike God, and utterly unworthy to receive any favour from him or to have any communion with him. Therefore we must be very grave, humble, and serious, and be reverent in speaking to him, as we are when we speak to a great man that is much our superior; and, in token of this, *let our words be few*, that they may be *well chosen*, <sup><3894></sup>Job 9:14. This does not condemn all long prayers; were they not good, the Pharisees would not have used them for a pretence; Christ prayed all night; and we are directed to *continue in prayer*. But it condemns careless heartless praying, *vain repetitions* (<sup><406></sup>Matthew 6:7), repeating *Pater-nosters* by tale. Let us speak to God, and of him, in his own words, words which the scripture teaches; and let our words, words of our own invention, be few, lest, not speaking by rule, we speak amiss.

(2.) That the multiplying of words in our devotions will make them *the sacrifices of fools*, v. 3. As confused dreams, frightful and perplexed, and such as disturb the sleep, are an evidence of a hurry of business which fills our head, so many words and hasty ones, used in prayer, are an evidence of folly reigning in the heart, ignorance of and unacquaintedness with both God and ourselves, low thoughts of God, and careless thoughts of our own souls. Even in common conversation *a fool is known by the multitude of words*; those that know least talk most (<sup><2111></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:11), particularly in devotion; there, no doubt, *a prating fool shall fall* (<sup><2108></sup>Proverbs 10:8, 10), shall fall short of acceptance. Those are fools indeed who think they *shall be heard*, in prayer, *for their much speaking*.

## <sup><2108></sup>ECCLESIASTES 5:4-8

### THE OBLIGATION OF A VOW

Four things we are exhorted to in these verses: —

**I.** To be conscientious in paying our vows.

**1.** A vow is a bond upon the soul (<sup><4062></sup>Numbers 30:2), by which we solemnly oblige ourselves, not only, in general, to do that which we are already bound to do, but, in some particular instances, to do that to do which we were not under any antecedent obligation, whether it respects honouring God or serving the interests of his kingdom among men. When, under the sense of some affliction (<sup><4064></sup>Psalms 66:14), or in the pursuit of

some mercy (<sup><911></sup>1 Samuel 1:11), thou hast vowed such a vow as this *unto God*, know that *thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord and thou canst not go back*; therefore,

**(1.)** Pay it; perform what thou hast promised; bring to God what thou hast dedicated and devoted to him: *Pay that which thou hast vowed*; pay it in full and *keep not back any part of the price*; pay it in kind, do not *alter it or change it*, so the law was, <sup><927></sup>Leviticus 27:10. Have we vowed to *give our own selves unto the Lord*? Let us then be as good as our word, act in his service, to his glory, and not sacrilegiously alienate ourselves.

**(2.)** *Defer not to pay it*. If it be in the power of thy hands to pay it to-day, leave it not till to-morrow; do not *beg a day*, nor put it off to a more convenient season. By delay the sense of the obligation slackens and cools, and is in danger of wearing off; we thereby discover a loathsomeness and backwardness to perform our vow; and *qui non est hodie cras minus aptus erit* — *he who is not inclined to-day will be averse to-morrow*. The longer it is put off the more difficult it will be to bring ourselves to it; death may not only prevent the payment, but fetch thee to judgment, under the guilt of a broken vow, <sup><971></sup>Psalms 76:11.

**2.** Two reasons are here given why we should speedily and cheerfully pay our vows: —

**(1.)** Because otherwise we affront God; we play the fool with him, as if we designed to put a trick upon him; and *God has no pleasure in fools*. More is implied than is expressed; the meaning is, He greatly abhors such fools and such foolish dealings. *Has he need of fools*? No; *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*, but will surely and severely reckon with those that thus play fast and loose with him.

**(2.)** Because otherwise we wrong ourselves, we lose the benefit of the making of the *vow*, nay, we incur the penalty for the breach of it; so that it would have been better a great deal *not to have vowed*, more safe and more to our advantage, than to *vow and not to pay*. Not to have *vowed* would have been but an omission, but to *vow and not pay* incurs the guilt of treachery and perjury; it is *lying to God*, <sup><413></sup>Acts 5:4.

**II.** To be cautious in making our vows. This is necessary in order to our being conscientious in performing them, v. 6.

**1.** We must take heed that we never vow anything that is sinful, or that may be an occasion of sin, for such a vow is ill-made and must be broken. *Suffer not thy mouth*, by such a vow, *to cause thy flesh to sin*, as Herod's rash promise caused him to cut off the head of John the Baptist.

**2.** We must not vow that which, through the frailty of the flesh, we have reason to fear we shall not be able to perform, as those that vow a single life and yet know not how to keep their vow. Hereby,

**(1.)** They shame themselves; for they are forced to *say before the angel*, *It was an error*, that either they did not mean or did not consider what they said; and, take it which way you will, it is bad enough. "When thou hast made a *vow*, do not seek to evade it, nor find excuses to get clear of the obligation of it; *say not before the priest*, who is called the *angel or messenger of the Lord of hosts*, that, upon second thoughts, thou hast changed thy mind, and desirest to be absolved from the obligation of thy vow; but stick to it, and do not seek a hole to creep out at." Some by the *angel* understand the guardian angel which they suppose to attend every man and to inspect what he does. Others understand it of Christ, *the Angel of the covenant*, who is present with his people in their assemblies, who searches the heart, and cannot be imposed upon; *provoke him not, for God's name is in him*, and he is represented as strict and jealous, <sup>(23)</sup>Exodus 23:20, 21.

**(2.)** They expose themselves to the wrath of God, for he is *angry at the voice of those that thus lie unto him with their mouth and flatter him with their tongue*, and is displeased at their dissimulation, and *destroys the works of their hands*, that is, blasts their enterprises, and defeats those purposes which, when they made these vows, they were seeking to God for the success of. If we treacherously cancel the words of our mouths, and revoke our vows, God will justly overthrow our projects, and walk contrary, and at all adventures, with those that thus walk contrary, and at all adventures with him. It is *a snare to a man, after vows, to make enquiry*.

**III.** To keep up the fear of God, v. 7. Many, of old, pretended to know the mind of God by *dreams*, and were so full of them that they almost made God's people forget his name by their *dreams* (<sup>(24)</sup>Jeremiah 23:25, 26); and many now perplex themselves with their frightful or odd dreams, or with other people's dreams, as if they foreboded this or the other disaster. Those

that heed dreams shall have a multitude of them to fill their heads with; but in them all *there are divers vanities*, as there are in many words, and the more if we regard them. “They are but like the idle impertinent chat of children and fools, and therefore never heed them; forget them; instead of repeating them lay no stress upon them, draw no disquieting conclusions from them, but *fear thou God*; have an eye to his sovereign dominion, set him before thee, keep thyself in his love, and be afraid of offending him, and then thou wilt not disturb thyself with foolish dreams.” The way not to be dismayed at the signs of heaven, nor afraid *of the idols of the heathen*, is to *fear God as King of nations*, <sup><411></sup>Jeremiah 10:2, 5, 7.

**IV.** With that to keep down the fear of man, v. 8. “Set God before thee, and then, if *thou seest the oppression of the poor*, thou wilt not *marvel at the matter*, nor find fault with divine Providence, nor think the worse of the institution of magistracy, when thou seest the ends of it thus perverted, nor of religion, when thou seest it will not secure men from suffering wrong.” Observe here,

**1.** A melancholy sight on earth, and such as cannot but trouble every good man that has a sense of justice and a concern for mankind, to see *the oppression of the poor* because they are poor and cannot defend themselves, and the *violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province*, oppression under colour of law and backed with power. The kingdom in general may have a good government, and yet it may so happen that a particular province may be committed to a bad man, by whose mal-administration justice may be perverted; so hard it is for the wisest of kings, in giving preferments, to be sure of their men; they can but redress the grievance when it appears.

**2.** A comfortable sight in heaven. When things look thus dismal we may satisfy ourselves with this,

**(1.)** That, though oppressors be *high*, God is *above them*, and in that very thing wherein *they deal proudly*, <sup><421></sup>Exodus 18:11. God is *higher than the highest* of creatures, than the highest of princes, than the king that is *higher than Agag* (<sup><422></sup>Numbers 24:7), than the highest angels, the *thrones and dominions* of the upper world. God is the *Most High over all the earth*, and his *glory is above the heavens*; before him princes are worms, the brightest but glow-worms.



(2.) That, though oppressors be secure, God has his eye upon them, takes notice of, and will reckon for, all their violent perverting of judgment; *he regards*, not only sees it but observes it, and keeps it on record, to be called over again; his *eyes are upon their ways*. See <sup><192></sup>Job 24:23.

(3.) That there is a world of angels, for there are *higher than they*, who are employed by the divine justice for protecting the injured and punishing the injurious. Sennacherib valued himself highly upon his potent army, but one angel proved too hard for him and all his forces. Some, by those *that are higher than they* understand the great council of the nation, the presidents to whom the *princes of the provinces are accountable* (<sup><206></sup>Daniel 6:2), the senate that receive complaints against the proconsuls, the courts above to which appeals are made from the inferior courts, which are necessary to the good government of a kingdom. Let it be a check to oppressors that perhaps their superiors on earth may call them to an account; however, God the Supreme in heaven will.

## <sup><215></sup>ECCLESIASTES 5:9-17

### THE VANITY OF RICHES

Solomon had shown the vanity of pleasure, gaiety, and fine works, of honour, power, and royal dignity; and there is many a covetous worldling that will agree with him, and speak as slightly as he does of these things; but money, he thinks, is a substantial thing, and if he can but have enough of that he is happy. This is the mistake which Solomon attacks, and attempts to rectify, in these verses; he shows that there is as much vanity in great riches, and the *lust of the eye* about them, as there is in the *lusts of the flesh* and the *pride of life*, and a man can make himself no more happy by hoarding an estate than by spending it.

**I.** He grants that the products of the earth, for the support and comfort of human life, are valuable things (v. 9): *The profit of the earth is for all*. Man's body, being made of the earth, thence has its maintenance (<sup><385></sup>Job 28:5); and that it has so, and that a *barren land* is not *made his dwelling* (as he has deserved for being rebellious, <sup><386></sup>Psalm 68:6), is an instance of God's great bounty to him. There is *profit to be got out of the earth*, and it is *for all*; all need it; it is appointed for all; there is enough for all. It is not only for all men, but for all the inferior creatures; the same ground brings

*grass for the cattle that brings herbs for the service of men. Israel had bread from heaven, angels' food, but (which is a humbling consideration) the earth is our storehouse and the beasts are fellow-commoners with us. The king himself is served of the field, and would be ill served, would be quite starved, without its products. This puts a great honour upon the husbandman's calling, that it is the most necessary of all to the support of man's life. The many have the benefit of it; the mighty cannot live without it; it is for all; it is for the king himself. Those that have an abundance of the fruits of the earth must remember they are for all, and therefore must look upon themselves but as stewards of their abundance, out of which they must give to those that need. Dainty meats and soft clothing are only for some, but the fruit of the earth is for all. And even those that suck the abundance of the seas (<sup>4639</sup>Deuteronomy 33:19) cannot be without the fruit of the earth, while those that have a competency of the fruit of the earth may despise the abundance of the seas.*

**II.** He maintains that the riches that are more than these, that are for hoarding, not for use, are *vain things*, and will not make a man easy or happy. That which our Saviour has said (<sup>4025</sup>Luke 12:15), *that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses*, is what Solomon here undertakes to prove by various arguments.

**1.** The more men have the more they would have, v. 10. A man may have but a little silver and be satisfied with it, may know when he has enough and covet no more. *Godliness, with contentment, is great gain. I have enough*, says Jacob; *I have all, and abound*, says St. Paul: but,

**(1.)** He that *loves silver*, and sets his heart upon it, will never think he has enough, but *enlarges his desire as hell* (<sup>3115</sup>Habakkuk 2:5), *lays house to house and field to field* (<sup>2118</sup>Isaiah 5:8), and, like *the daughters of the horse-leech, still cries, Give, give*. Natural desires are at rest when that which is desired is obtained, but corrupt desires are insatiable. Nature is content with little, grace with less, but lust with nothing.

**(2.)** He that has silver in abundance, and has it increasing ever so fast upon him, yet does not find that it yields any solid satisfaction to his soul. There are bodily desires which silver itself will not satisfy; if a man be hungry, ingots of silver will do no more to satisfy his hunger than clods of clay. Much less will worldly abundance satisfy spiritual desires; he that has ever so much silver covets more, not only of that, but of something else, something of another nature. Those that make themselves drudges to the

world are spending their *labour for that which satisfies not* (<sup>258D</sup>Isaiah 55:2), which fills the belly, but will never fill the soul, (<sup>307B</sup>Ezekiel 7:19.

**2.** The more men have the more occasion they have for it, and the more they have to do with it, so that it is as broad as it is long: *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them*, v. 11. *The more meat the more mouths*. Does the estate thrive? And does not the family at the same time grow more numerous and the children grow up to need more? The more men have the better house they must keep, the more servants they must employ, the more guests they must entertain, the more they must give to the poor, and the more they will have hanging on them, for where *the carcase is the eagles will be*. What we have more than food and raiment we have *for others*; and then *what good is there to the owners themselves*, but the pleasure of *beholding it with their eyes*? And a poor pleasure it is. An empty speculation is all the difference between the owners and the sharers; the owner sees that as his own which those about him enjoy as much of the real benefit of as he; only he has the satisfaction of doing good to others, which indeed is a satisfaction to one who believes what Christ said, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive*; but to a covetous man, who thinks all lost that goes beside himself, it is a constant vexation to see others eat of his increase.

**3.** The more men have the more care they have about it, which perplexes them and disturbs their repose, v. 12. Refreshing sleep is as much the support and comfort of this life as food is. Now,

**(1.)** Those commonly sleep best that work hard and have but what they work for: *The sleep of the labouring man is sweet*, not only because he has tired himself with his labour, which makes his sleep the more welcome to him and makes him sleep soundly, but because he has little to fill his head with care about and so break his sleep. His sleep is sweet, though he eat but little and have but little to eat, for his weariness rocks him asleep; and, though he eat much, yet he can sleep well, for his labour gets him a good digestion. The sleep of the diligent Christian, and his long sleep, is sweet; for, having spent himself and his time in the service of God, he can cheerfully return to God and repose in him as his rest.

**(2.)** Those that have every thing else often fail to secure a good night's sleep. Either their eyes are held waking or their sleeps are unquiet and do not refresh them; and it is their abundance that breaks their sleep and disturbs it, both the abundance of their care (as the rich man's who, when

his ground brought forth plentifully, thought within himself, *What shall I do?* <sup><017></sup>Luke 12:17) and the abundance of what they eat and drink which overcharges the heart, makes them sick, and so hinders their repose. Ahasuerus, after a banquet of wine, could not sleep; and perhaps consciousness of guilt, both in getting and using what they have, breaks their sleep as much as any thing. But *God gives his beloved sleep.*

**4.** The more men have the more danger they are in both of doing mischief and of having mischief done them (v. 13): *There is an evil, a sore evil,* which Solomon himself had *seen under the sun,* in this lower world, this theatre of sin and woe — *riches left for the owners thereof* (who have been industrious to hoard them and keep them safely) *to their hurt;* they would have been better without them.

**(1.)** Their riches *do them hurt,* make them proud, secure, and in love with the world, draw away their hearts from God and duty, and make it very difficult for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven, nay, help to shut them out of it.

**(2.)** They *do hurt with their riches,* which not only put them into a capacity of gratifying their own lusts and living luxuriously, but give them an opportunity of oppressing others and dealing hardly with them.

**(3.)** Often they sustain *hurt by their riches.* They would not be envied, would not be robbed, if they were not rich. It is the fat beast that is led first to the slaughter. A very rich man (as one observes) has sometimes been excepted out of a general pardon, both as to life and estate, merely on account of his vast and overgrown estate; so riches *often take away the life of the owners thereof,* <sup><019></sup>Proverbs 1:19.

**5.** The more men have the more they have to lose, and perhaps they may lose it all, v. 14. Those riches that have been laid up with a great deal of pains, and kept with a great deal of care, *perish by evil travail,* by the very pains and care which they take to secure and increase them. Many a one has ruined his estate by being over-solicitous to advance it and make it more, and has lost all by catching at all. Riches are perishing things, and all our care about them cannot make them otherwise; they *make themselves wings and fly away.* He that thought he should have made his son a gentleman leaves him a beggar; he *begets a son,* and brings him up in the prospect of an estate, but, when he dies, leaves it under a charge of debt as much as it is worth, so that *there is nothing in his hand.* This is a

common case; estates that made a great show do not prove what they seemed, but cheat the heir.

**6.** How much soever men have when they die, they must leave it all behind them (v. 15, 16): *As he came forth of his mother's womb naked, so shall he return;* only as his friends, when he came naked into the world, in pity to him, helped him with swaddling-clothes, so, when he goes out, they help him with grave-clothes, and that is all. See ~~807~~ Job 1:21; ~~397~~ Psalm 49:17. This is urged as a reason why we should be content with such things as we have, ~~506~~ 1 Timothy 6:7. In respect of the body we must go as we came; the dust shall return to the earth as it was. But sad is our case if the soul return as it came, for we were born in sin, and if we die in sin, unsanctified, we had better never have been born; and that seems to be the case of the worldling here spoken of, for he is said to *return in all points as he came*, as sinful, as miserable, and much more so. This is a *sore evil*; he thinks it so whose heart is glued to the world, that he *shall take nothing of his labour which he may carry away in his hand*; his riches will not go with him into another world nor stand him in any stead there. If we labour in religion, the grace and comfort we get by that labour we may carry away in our hearts, and shall be the better for it to eternity; that is meat that endures. But if we labour only for the world, to fill our hands with that, we cannot take that away with us; we are born with our hands griping, but we die with them extended, letting go what we held fast. So that, upon the whole matter, he may well ask, *What profit has he that has laboured for the wind?* Note, Those that labour for the world labour for the wind, for that which has more sound than substance, which is uncertain, and always shifting its point, unsatisfying, and often hurtful, which we cannot hold fast, and which, if we take up with it as our portion, will no more feed us than the *wind*, ~~321~~ Hosea 12:1. Men will see that they have *laboured for the wind* when at death they find the profit of their labour is all gone, gone like the wind, they know not whither.

**7.** Those that have much, if they set their hearts upon it, have not only uncomfortable deaths, but uncomfortable lives too, v. 17. This covetous worldling, that is so bent upon raising an estate, *all his days eats in darkness and much sorrow, and it is his sickness and wrath*; he has not only no pleasure of his estate, nor any enjoyment of it himself, for he *eats the bread of sorrow* (~~407~~ Psalm 127:2), but a great deal of vexation to see others eat of it. His necessary expenses make him sick, make him fret, and he seems as if he were angry that himself and those about him cannot live

without meat. As we read the last clause, it intimates how ill this covetous worldling can bear the common and unavoidable calamities of human life. When he is in health he *eats in darkness*, always dull with care and fear about what he has; but, if he be sick, *he has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness*; he is vexed that his sickness takes him off from his business and hinders him in his pursuits of the world, vexed that all his wealth will not give him any ease or relief, but especially terrified with the apprehensions of death (which his diseases are the harbingers of), of leaving this world and the things of it behind him, which he has set his affections upon, and removing to a world he has made no preparation for. He has not any *sorrow after a godly sort*, does not *sorrow to repentance*, but he has *sorrow and wrath*, is angry at the providence of God, angry at his sickness, angry at all about him, fretful and peevish, which doubles his affliction, which a good man lessens and lightens by patience and joy in his sickness.

## ~~2158~~ ECCLESIASTES 5:18-20

### GRATEFUL ENJOYMENT

Solomon, from the vanity of riches hoarded up, here infers that the best course we can take is to use well what we have, to serve God with it, to do good with it, and take the comfort of it to ourselves and our families; this he had pressed before, ~~2124~~ Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:22. Observe,

**1.** What it is that is here recommended to us, not to indulge the appetites of the flesh, or to take up with present pleasures or profits for our portion, but soberly and moderately to make use of what Providence has allotted for our comfortable passage through this world. We must not starve ourselves through covetousness, because we cannot afford ourselves food convenient, nor through eagerness in our worldly pursuits, nor through excessive care and grief, but *eat and drink* what is fit for us to keep our bodies in good plight for the serving of our souls in God's service. We must not kill ourselves with *labour*, and then leave others *to enjoy the good* of it, but take the comfort of that which our hands have laboured for, and that not now and then, but *all the days of our life which God gives us*. Life is God's gift, and he has appointed us *the number of the days* of our life (~~1845~~ Job 14:5); let us therefore spend those days in *servicing the Lord our*

*God with joyfulness and gladness of heart.* We must not do the business of our calling as a drudgery, and make ourselves slaves to it, but we must *rejoice in our labour*, not grasp at more business than we can go through without perplexity and disquiet, but take a pleasure in the calling wherein God has put us, and go on in the business of it with cheerfulness. This it to *rejoice in our labour*, whatever it is, as *Zebulun in his going out and Issachar in his tents*.

2. What is urged to recommend it to us.

(1.) That *it is good and comely* to do this. It is well, and it looks well. Those that cheerfully use what God has given them thereby honour the giver, answer the intention of the gift, act rationally and generously, do good in the world, and make what they have turn to the best account, and this is both their credit and their comfort; *it is good and comely*; there is duty and decency in it.

(2.) That it is all the good we can have out of the things of this world: *It is our portion*, and in doing thus we take our portion, and make the best of bad. This is our part of our worldly possession. God must have his part, the poor theirs, and our families theirs, but this is ours; it is all that falls to our lot out of them.

(3.) That a heart to do thus is such a gift of God's grace as crowns all the gifts of his providence. If God has given a man *riches and wealth*, he completes the favour, and makes that a blessing indeed, if withal he *gives him power to eat thereof*, wisdom and grace to take the good of it and to do good with it. If this *is God's gift*, we must *covet it earnestly as the best gift* relating to our enjoyments in this world.

(4.) That this is the way to make our own lives easy and to relieve ourselves against the many toils and troubles which our lives on earth are incident to (v. 20): *He shall not much remember the days of his life*, the days of his sorrow and sore travail, his working days, his weeping days. He shall either forget them or remember them as waters that pass away; he shall not much lay to heart his crosses, nor long retain the bitter relish of them, *because God answers him in the joy of his heart*, balances all the grievances of his labour with the joy of it and recompenses him for it by giving him to *eat the labour of his hands*. If he does not answer all his desires and expectations, in the letter of them, yet he answers them with that which is more than equivalent, *in the joy of his heart*. A cheerful spirit

is a great blessing; it makes the yoke of our employments easy and the burden of our afflictions light.