

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Introduction:

Although we have a new chapter, the theme has not change. The Holy Spirit is still seeking to unmask the illusion that wealth is something special. Most people who live “*under the sun*,” see wealth as a special blessing. They believe if they could have wealth, they would have reached a special area of comfort, peace, and security that those without it do not have. They would be able to buy whatever they want and have comforts and possessions to fill their lives with excitement and joy. They could travel and take life easy. It is this illusive ability of money that has led many to put it in the place of God. But although that is the perception and many have sought for and loved it with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, it is an illusion.

God revealed in the previous chapter that this is not the whole story. There is more to wealth than meets the eye. There are many unforeseen things that accompany wealth that negate its value changing it from a blessing to a curse.

1. There is no lasting satisfaction to money. The more one has the more one wants. 5:10
2. The more money one has the more people need to be supported and the more responsibilities it creates. Many times wealth brings more headaches than solutions. 5:11
3. When the veneer of wealth’s value and the possessions it purchases are stripped away, the only real advantage of wealth and possessions is to look at them. 5:11
4. One of our most precious possessions is sleep. For many it takes about eight hours out of the day, and those who enjoy it are greatly benefitted from it. Wealth and possessions severely diminish the ability to enjoy sleep. 5:11
5. The tentacles and claws of wealth and possessions can be driven so deeply into the hearts of those who have it that they will actually hold on to their wealth even when it hurts them and they would be better to get rid of it. People have lost friends, families, health and even their lives in their quest for it. 5:12
6. Even those who put forth great effort and toil to gain riches and successfully master for a time can later lose it. Such people are in a terrible state of agitation, sorrow and bitterness of mind. 5:13
7. The final conclusion one ought to draw about “life under the sun” is that it begins the same for all who are born. We all enter naked and we all leave naked. This means that all labor put forth to gain wealth and possessions is actually wasted effort. Truly “you can’t take it with you.” 5:14-16

God’s counsel is to take a pass on wealth as a pursuit of life. If it comes as a matter of course, enjoy it and use it wisely, but don’t seek it. The real joys of life are eating, drinking and enjoying ourselves in all our labor. 5:18-20

The sixth chapter begins with another grievous evil that wealth can create.

1. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun,

This is the fourth of five times that the word “evil” is used in this section(5:13, 14, 16; 6:1, 2) to describe the consequences of a love of wealth and abundance. Since this term can refer to things that are unpleasant and painful in either the physical/emotional and spiritual/moral realms, each time it is used one must seriously ponder which is under consideration.

ra’ ... refers to ... “bad” or “evil,” in a wide variety of applications. A greater number... signify something morally evil or hurtful ... also used to denote evil words ... evil thoughts... or evil actions... may mean “bad” or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness: ... (Vines #7451)

It appears in this case to be “*bad’ or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness.*” Those who set as their goal of life the accumulation of wealth and abundance may find this serious

problem at their own doorstep some day.

and it is common among men:

Before describing this evil, he first addressed the rationalization some might make that this was only an exception and seldom occurred. Many people reading this would say something like: *"It doesn't happen often and won't happen to me!"* But the Holy Spirit here revealed that it is actually very *"common."* This was used when a writer wanted to describe something that was either *"great"* or *"large,"* or something that *"represents plurality in number or amount."* It referred to things that happened over and over, so often it must be factored in as a real possibility of what could occur if to anyone who seeks wealth and abundance.

This is not a simple exception, it happens so often it must be carefully considered before one decides to make this a quest or goal.

2. A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor,

He directs us to someone who has everything. He has riches and wealth and honor. "Riches" and "wealth" the accumulation of treasure, riches and wealth. He has been successful in all his endeavors, and not only has all that one could desire in possessions, but has also lived in such a way as to maintain and enhance the way others look at him. He is a man who has "honor" and a good reputation. This term takes in *"honor," "wealth," "significant and positive 'reputation'" "majesty,"* and *"splendor,"*

kabod, "honor; glory; great quantity; multitude; wealth; reputation [majesty]; splendor." Cognates of this word appear in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Akkadian. It appears about 200 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods. Kabod refers to the great physical weight or "quantity" of a thing. The word does not mean simply "heavy," but a heavy or imposing quantity of things.... *Kabod* often refers to both "wealth" and significant and positive "reputation" (in a concrete sense). ... The second emphasis appears in Gen. 45:13, where Joseph told his brothers to report to his "father... all my [majesty] in Egypt." ... Trees, forests, and wooded hills have an imposing quality, a richness or "splendor." ... *Kabod* can also have an abstract emphasis of "glory," imposing presence or position. Phinehas' wife named their son Ichabod, "saying, The glory is departed from Israel:... 1 Sam. 4:21). ... (Vine's # 3519)

This is someone who has reached the pinnacle of what multitudes today believe that *"life under the sun"* can offer. Many have even been enticed to leave God's presence and seek for this very thing. Yet in or out of God's presence, Solomon through inspiration wants it known that it was still only through God's providential care that anyone could attain to this a position. This is a fact men often overlook, but God wanted it remembered.

who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end — 17 then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' Deut 8:15-17

that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matt 5:45-46

turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, 16 who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Acts 14:15-18

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. James 1:17-18

so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires;

All that success can bring is within this man's grasp. He lacks nothing of all he desires. The goals he set earlier in his life have all been reached. His "desires" have all been fulfilled. That for which he made himself *"wait longingly" "sigh," "crave," "long for" "yearn for"* he has now gained. All the

deferred pleasures and goals of youth have now been mastered.

'avah- to desire, to incline, to covet, to wait longingly, to wish, to sigh, to want, to be greedy, to prefer
a) ... to crave (food and drink) b) (in the Hithpael) to desire, to long for, to yearn for, to lust after (used of bodily appetites) (BDB # 183)

He now has a good reputation, wealth, riches, and everything he ever wanted. Few would not envy and wish for what this man has. Yet the next fact makes it all meaningless and futile. Fruitless and empty. There is no value to it at all once we read the next line.

yet God does not give him power to eat of it,

God does not even give the reason. He simply states as a fact that He controls all things and has determined that things are going to go differently than this man proposed. He will not have the "power" to eat of it. He will not *"have mastery"* *"dominate"* or *"exercise power over"* the remaining years of his life in the manner he intended.

shalat- to domineer, to exercise power over, to dominate, to have mastery, to be master, to lord it over..." (BDB # 7980)

The real point here is that man has so little control over his own life that it is foolish for him to make plans that rely on having that control. We cannot even see into the future let alone control it. This man reached all his goals and has a wonderful life ahead of him except for one problem. He does not have the ability to control tomorrow. What most people fail to take into account is described at the end of this book. It often takes a long time for someone to reach the position describe here. If we begin at twenty we might be fifty or sixty before we reached it.

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|---|---|
| 1. Many leave this world forever. | 3. There could be war that destroys everything. |
| 2. Others lose health(stroke, heart failure). | 4. The collapse of the economic |

One can't help but think of the parable Jesus used to illustrate this very point.

So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:18-21

This man worked his whole life, reached the pinnacle he sought, but as he moved to the next phase, his life ended and all that he had done was for another.

He worked hard, won all that he desired, then had it taken from him just as he was to begin enjoying it.

but a foreigner consumes it.

It does not even go to his wife, children or to someone he at least knows. It goes to a *"foreigner"* who did not work for it. This is someone who is *"unknown"* or *"unfamiliar"* with him.

nokriy- foreign, alien a) foreign b) a foreigner (substantive) ... d) unknown, unfamiliar # 5237

It does not even end up helping his wife, children or those whom he loved. This is clearly a worst case scenario, but it is common. Someone who does not even know him ends up with everything. It might go to the government. Perhaps with no will, it goes to the lawyers and others who are able to divide it up. Whatever the reason. He got nothing from all this work and toil.

This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.

Whatever way this might come about, it is vanity. Vanity is *"used of what soon vanishes away," "a vapor"* or *"bubble."* It therefore aptly describes things that are *"empty, fruitless," meaningless or purposeless."*

This one point makes wealth and the accumulation of possessions fruitless. It is such a waste of

time and effort if it ends like this. For a man to work and toil and labor and reach all his goals and then have the right to enjoy it removed and given to someone he does not even know is not only vanity, it is an evil affliction(Disease-KJV).

choli, "sickness." This noun occurs about 23 times. ... The meaning of "sickness" occurs in Deut. 7:15: "And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases [*madweh*] of Egypt...." *choli* is used metaphorically as a distress of the land in Hos. 5:13. (Vine's # 2483)

It is a sickening and dreadful thing to think about. Words can hardly express how unfair and despicable it is. Yet it is a part of the sin-cursed world in which we live, and it is wise to take into consideration the possibility. There is not a man in his prime anywhere, no matter how successful he might be to whom this is not possible. Therefore all who seek for wealth as an end within itself should be warned and think through the risks.

3. If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many,

Another risk for seeking wealth is the actual emotion of covetousness that brings it about. Although some can control and keep it within limits, multitudes do not. The danger lies in it being an insatiable emotion. Thus even with all the outward signs of enjoyment and success a man can still have nothing. To illustrate this he speaks of a man who has begotten a hundred children. This would be considered a great blessing and crown of honor. A sign of success and prosperity.

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. 5 Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate. Ps 127:3-5

Added to this great gift, reward and blessing of many children is the additional blessing of a long life.

The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Ps 90:10

Thus, this man has all that life could bring. A fruitful wife, a long life, many many children. Another wonderful outward success story! Who could not view such a man without feeling in their heart that they had been blessed with a good life? Who would not say that they had gained all that life has to give? Yet once again, because of covetousness and an insatiable desire for more, the stark and bleak reality is not at all what one would think.

but his soul is not satisfied with goodness,

What we see on the outside is not what is happening on the inside. This man's "soul" is not satisfied. The soul is the "essence of life," "the inner self," "what one is to oneself" as opposed to "what one appears to be to one's observers."

While outside observers might congratulate this man as being successful and having it all, his inner self is not satisfied. He does not feel "fulfilled," doesn't "have enough." Though he has all the things God created life to offer, they have not left him feeling satisfied. He keeps looking for something more. Always hoping that the next event might make life satisfactory.

"sabea... saw-bay'-ah; a prim. root; to sate, i.e. fill to satisfaction (lit. or fig.): --have enough, fill (full, self, with),, be (to the) full (of), have plenty of, be satiate, satisfy, (with), suffice..." (Strong p 113; 7646)

What is life worth to a man who has all the outward visible signs of success, but does not feel the inward ones? When he has all the goodness that life has to offer, but finds that it is not enough?

Such a man cannot find anything that will fill with satisfaction, nothing that gives enough, nothing that fills or satiates. He is always empty, never can he find anything that ever gives him the feeling that he has found the quality of goodness. When all this is added to the definition of goodness, it becomes clearer. Goodness includes those things that make one "glad," "joyful," and "merry." Things that are "bountiful," "pleasant," and "sweet."

"...towb, good (as an adj.) in the widest sense; used likewise as a noun... (good, a good or good thing,

a good man or woman; the good, goods, or good things, good men or women)... also as an adv. (well):- beautiful, best, better, bountiful, cheerful, at ease, fair... favor, find, glad, good... graciously, joyful, kindly, kindness,... loving, merry, most, pleasant, + pleaseth, pleasure, precious, prosperity, ready, sweet, wealth, welfare, (be) well([-favoured]).” (Strong p 45 2896)

Take these two thoughts and mold them together and what does one come up with? A man who can find nothing in this life that will satisfy him. Nothing in this life that brings any joy, or gladness. Can find nothing to find pleasant and sweet. Every good thing God created to bless man and give him joy brings no satisfaction to the man under the control of covetousness. has The man who in his inner self never feels satisfied with anything that this life has to offer. Whether this be his state of mind, or the circumstances he is living under is immaterial. The one who is never happy and knows nothing good or pleasant is not going to find any enjoyment in life.

Thus the real damage of covetousness is revealed and it becomes easier to see why it is found in the 10 commandments. We must learn to be content with what he have and not to yearn for what we do not have.

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. Phil. 4:11-13

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 1Tim. 6:6-8

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. Heb. 13:5

or indeed he has no burial,

A second point is the man who “has no burial.” This term is defined:

qebuwrah or qeburah- a grave, burial, the burial site a) a grave b) burial # 6900

One simple question offers the obvious meaning to this statement. When a man dies, who does he count on to bury him? Obviously his friends and family. If he has no burial, then it means that his life has been lived in such a way that he has no friends and family or they do not care enough about him to show him this honor at his death. With a hundred children and many years, how could he possibly die and have no burial? If any man can live his whole life, and at the end of it can not find a single person who would be concerned enough about him to give him a burial what kind of a life is that? A life of squandered opportunities and of misplaced priorities.

A man who has a full bank account, but no friends, and no one who cares about him would indeed be living a life not worth living. When Charles Dickens wrote “A Christmas Carol”, this was the kind of man he had in mind. A man so possessed by his possessions that he never took the time to make a friend in the world. He never bothered to take the time to help anyone or to in any way keep friends and loved ones interested in him. What is the point to such a life? Where is the happiness? Where is the value and the joy? A life with no one who cares about one, and a life in which no one would even bother to attend the funeral would be empty. Better to be dead at birth than to live such an empty life.

He was thirty-two years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed. 2 Chron 21:20

I say that a stillborn child is better than he--

These are strong words, but they are true and should be soberly reflected upon. A man who cannot find satisfaction in all that God has created for him to enjoy will find no value in life no matter how long he lives. If men and women cannot find joy, happiness, and contentment in the life God created for them, then they would be better off as a miscarriage.

nepheh ... an untimely birth, an abortion, a miscarriage # 5309

This is one of those things that only God could say. No man would dare to make a statement like this. But it is in the inspired book. It warns us to listen to God and to trust Him with all our heart, and

to gratefully enjoy the things He created for us to enjoy. Overreaching into things that are forbidden leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness that ultimately can lead to this situation. God is not content however simply to state it as a fact, he wants the reasons clearly understood:

4. for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness.

The reason for the above strong assertion is now offered. The still born child comes in emptiness, and departs in darkness. What a terrible let down for the parents, and for the child who was prepared to enjoy all that God had to give. The name which the parents had so lovingly selected to give this precious infant also is covered in darkness. This is the terrible circumstance of a child who dies before it is born. It is born in vain. There was no profit to it, all hopes are dashed, all plans emptied of their joy and the parents are left with great sorrow and grief. Yet this is not only true for the parents.

5. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything,

This infant never got to see the sun. Never knew the joy of being held by a mother, of feeling the love of a father. Never saw brothers and sisters, never enjoyed the spring or the summer, never knew the beauties of fall and winter. Never sat by the fire, never learned to love the things of this life, did not get to enjoy a meal and a good beverage, never enjoyed marriage and being a parent. It never knew any of this, but:

this has more rest than that man,

Koheleth maximizes the sorrow of the loss of life in a stillborn infant in order to show just how bad it is for a man who lives a full life but refuses to enjoy all that God has given, never being satisfied, always grumbling, complaining, and overreaching. The stillborn death of an infant is a horrible and terrible thing, a life cut off even before it began, but God states that the infant is actually in a better position in some respects than the man who lives many years, has many children, but is not satisfied and has no one to bury him. He has more rest. He has more quietness and peace.

nachath- 1) rest, quietness a) quietness, quiet attitude b) rest (used of death) # 5183

6. even if he lives a thousand years twice over

Yet even this does not adequately finish the comparison. One could add to his wealth and children an additional 2,000 years of life and it still wouldn't make any difference. He would still have been better off to be a stillborn child. Consider this well! Even if he could be wealthy, have many children, and live 2,000 years, it would not change the comparison. The stillborn child still has the advantage. Thus the terrible consequences of giving one's self over to covetousness are revealed. It is a life that is no life! A life that never enjoys the goodness of what one has because it is always focused on what he does not have. It is empty, futile and a life not even worth living.

– but has not seen goodness.

Here is the real problem and point of comparison. The term goodness is the same word used in verse three. They are the things in life that God has designed to make one "*glad,*" "*joyful,*" and "*merry.*" The things that are "*bountiful,*" "*pleasant,*" and "*sweet.*" This is also the term used in the first chapter of Genesis to describe all that God had made being "*good.*" There are people who refuse to enjoy the things God created. They are not good enough or do not meet with his approval. Hence they refuse to see any goodness in life. Nothing is pleasant or sweet to them. They never feel glad joyful and merry as they experience the things God has created for them. With this outlook, there really isn't much difference is there? The man chooses never to enjoy the things spoken of above, while the stillborn child never has the choice to enjoy them. Neither sees any goodness, but the one who rebelliously refuses to do so is judged by God to be in a much worse condition than the one who had no choice. The child's life was squandered but he had no choice in the matter. The man squandered and wasted his life by his own choice.

Do not all go to one place?

The grave is as far as Ecclesiastes generally takes us. It seems best since the section has primarily

focused on the naked came and naked left that we remain there. Both the stillborn child and the man came naked and left naked. Both the stillborn child and the man never gained any enjoyment out of life, but the man felt dissatisfaction while the child did not. Though one lived 2000 years and the other died before birth. They both go to the same place and God concludes that the latter is better than the former.

7. All the labor of man is for his mouth,

The author now returns to a subject that one is forced to conclude is a recurring theme throughout the book. Solomon has concluded that a man should both enjoy good in his labor and to use the fruits of that labor to enjoy his food and his drink. Hence if one wants to be happy, all the work that they do should be focused primarily on these two things. Since they both go into the mouth he is referring back to them.

Nothing is better for a man than that he should **eat and drink**, and that his soul should **enjoy good in his labor**. This also, I saw, was **from the hand of God**. Eccl. 2:24-25

I know that **nothing is better** for them than to **rejoice, and to do good in their lives**, 13 and also that every man should **eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor** — **it is the gift of God**. Eccl. 3:12-13

Here is what I have seen: It is **good and fitting for one to eat and drink**, and to **enjoy the good of all his labor** in which he toils under the sun all the days of his **life which God gives him**; for **it is his heritage**. Eccl. 5:18-19

So I commended enjoyment, because a man has **nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry**; for this will remain with him in his labor all **the days of his life which God** gives him under the sun. Eccl. 8:15

Go, **eat your bread with joy**, And **drink your wine with a merry heart**; For God has already accepted your works. 8 Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil. 9 **Live joyfully with the wife whom you love** all **the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun**, all your days of vanity; **for that is your portion in life**, and in **the labor which you perform under the sun**. Eccl. 9:7-9

Solomon has made a profound revelation here. The true purpose for all the labor and toil “under the sun.” If man can be content with this one thing, he has found true contentment and satisfaction. Truly, the best “life under the sun” has to offer.

Although Jesus also included clothing, He too limited man’s basic needs to “*What shall we eat,*” “*what shall we drink,*” and “*What shall we wear?*”

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Mt. 6:31-34

Once we learn to be content with these things and trust in God to give them to us as our heritage, we can avoid the “*vanity and striving after wind*” of “wanting” that is the source of all covetousness. If we can learn to lower the level of our expectations to this degree and be happy if we can just have this, we are insulated and protected from grave danger.

And yet the soul is not satisfied.

Thus the foundation of all discontent that leads to sin is revealed. When the soul cannot be satisfied with this, then in yearning for other things, sin is created. So it was for Eve and so it was for Paul.

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree **desirable to make one wise**, she took of its fruit and ate. Gen. 3:6*

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would

not have known sin. **I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."** 8 But **sin, seizing an opportunity** through the commandment, **produced in me all kinds of covetousness.** Apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but **when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.** 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Rom. 7:7-12

The lack of satisfaction within the soul is the terrible curse our flesh has brought upon us. There is no hope unless we destroy these yearnings of dissatisfaction!! These yearnings become so strong that even after the law identified them as sin we can't stop the yearnings.

*Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. 14 For **we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh,** sold under sin. 15 **I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.** Rom. 7:13-16 (ESV)*

Listen to Paul as he described these terrible yearnings in his own heart which mirrors our own.

*Now **if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.** 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that **nothing good dwells** in me, that is, **in my flesh.** For **I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.** 19 For **I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.** 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For **I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,** 23 but I see **in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.** 24 **Wretched man that I am!** Who will deliver me from this body of death? Rom. 7:16-25*

In our rational moments, we can see exactly why God identifies a specific yearning as sin. But when the yearnings/cravings(lusts) come our mind becomes blind to everything else but the need to fulfill it. As soon as the enticement arrives, we fall once again into sin.

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But **each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.** 15 Then, **when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin;** and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. James 1:13-15*

Whether the Holy Spirit was referring to all this at that time is doubtful, but it is very helpful for us to understand it today as it opens up some important insights for our soul. The Hebrew term is very similar to the Greek. Our soul is the "essence of life," "inner self," "what one is to oneself" as opposed to "what one appears to be to one's observers." One of the most important things for us to cultivate is a sense of satisfaction with what we have. This is a different word than "his soul is not **satisfied** with goodness" in 6:3. This one means "to be full," "to be filled up' to the full extent of what is expected," and even "filling to overflowing."

malé 4390, "to fill, fulfill, overflow, ordain, endow." This verb occurs in all Semitic languages (including biblical Aramaic) and in all periods. Biblical Hebrew attests it about 250 times. Basically, malé means "to be full" in the sense of having something done to one. In 2 Kings 4:6, the word implies "to fill up": "And it came to pass, when the vessels were full,..." malé is sometimes used in the sense "coming to an end" or "to be filled up," to the full extent of what is expected. ... malé is used of "filling to overflowing"-- not just filling up to the limits of something, but filling so as to go beyond its limits: "For Jordan overfloweth all his banks..." Josh. 3:15. (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

"... to be abundant and overflowing; to fill, as anything does a vacant space with its own bulk or abundance, with an acc. of place; to fill a place with anything, with an acc. of place, and of the thing filling, to fill up; to fill the hand... to be filled, to be full, with an acc. of the thing with which is full; to be filled with that which takes full possession of the mind; to be fulfilled or completed..." (Wilson p 164)

This is what the soul ought to be with what goes into the mouth. We need to cultivate a sense of

fulness and satisfaction with the thanksgiving we offer to God.

We can always be content with this attitude. Anything beyond that and we are at risk of the danger described above. If we are not satisfied with food, we will soon move on to other things. We will not be satisfied with our possessions, our family, our spouse, our job, etc. Covetousness is insatiable. Solomon illustrated this in the Proverbs.

The leech has two daughters — Give and Give! There are three things that are never satisfied, Four never say, "Enough!": 16 The grave, The barren womb, The earth that is not satisfied with water — And the fire never says, "Enough!" Pr. 30:15-16

This seems to be the point here. Since you can never really be satisfied no matter how much you have that there is no point in beginning to walk down this path. There is no good reason for setting as one of our goals in life the complete fulfillment and satisfaction of the soul. The soul is never satisfied! It is never filled to overflowing, never filled to the full extent of what is expected. The most basic thing of life is the appetite, yet even when the stomach is as full as it can be, it is not long before man is thinking and pondering over the next meal. So it is with the soul. No matter how much one possesses, it is only a short time before one is seeking for even more.

8. For what more has the wise man than the fool?

This passage in this context has created a large diversity of opinion. It is among those difficult sayings in Scripture that are capable of more than one “right” interpretation. In such cases we must rely on context to keep things in tight perspective.

All the labor of man is for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. 8 For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows how to walk before the living? 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. Eccl. 6:7-9

It is evident that the satisfaction of the soul is the subject of verse 7 and 9. Learning to be satisfied with what we can see is better than the wandering of desire. Hence verse eight is clearly within the context of “satisfaction of the soul” on the one hand and “the wandering of desire” on the other. So this passage somehow illustrates or elaborates on these two extremes.

It seems best to limit the “wise man” the “fool” and the “poor man” to this context. Wise if they see and practice this truth, foolish if they don’t, and something which even if a man is destitute will allow him to “know how to walk before the living.” If both the wise man and the fool “under the sun” miss this most basic truth then how can one have an advantage over the other?

Since he has already spoken of them, the point of comparison is clear. The basic difference between the wise and the fool is their ability to see clearly.

Then I saw that wisdom excels folly As light excels darkness. 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all. Eccl 2:13-14

Hence the only real difference between the wise man and the fool is the ability to see the truth on whatever subject is under consideration. If it is God, “the fool has said in his heart, “There is no God” (Ps. 14:1), if it is his father, “a fool despises his father's instruction, But he who receives correction is prudent.” (Pr. 15:5).

The wise man knows how things work, he makes wise decisions and avoids many of troubles and problems of life. The fool is dull, foolish and stupid. Because of his lack of understanding of things, he brings many troubles and problems upon himself while missing great opportunities that present themselves to him because he is too foolish to see them.

The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it. Pr. 22:3

Yet still, the haunting question, “what more has the wise than the fool?” The term “more” has the sense of “superiority,” “advantage,” and of being “better.”

yowther- as a masculine noun: 1) superiority, advantage, excess as an adverb: 2) excess, better as a conjunction...” (# 3148)

Hence his question is actually a comparison. What advantage and superiority does the wise man have over a fool? What makes the wise man better than the fool? He doesn't answer it either positively or negatively, so before we can draw any conclusions regarding the reason why this verse is here, we have to examine his second question.

What does the poor man have. Who knows how to walk before the living?

The poor man is someone who is "*poor; weak; afflicted; humble.*" It generally emphasizes "*some kind of disability or distress.*" It is a person who must live "*from day to day*" and may be "*oppressed.*"

àni "poor; weak; afflicted; humble." This word, which also appears in early Aramaic and post-biblical Hebrew, occurs in biblical Hebrew about 76 times and in all periods. This noun is frequently used in synonymous parallelism with *èbyon* ("needy") and or *dal* ("poor"). It differs from both in emphasizing some kind of disability or distress. A hired servant as one who is in a lower (oppressive) social and material condition is described both as an *èbyon* and *àni*: "*Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy,...*" Deut. 24:14-15. ... Financially, the *àni* lives from day to day and is socially defenseless, being subject to oppression. ... The godly protect and deliver the "afflicted" Isa. 10:2; Ezek. 18:17, while the ungodly take advantage of them, increasing their oppressed condition Isa. 58:7. ... *àni* can refer to one who is physically oppressed: "Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine" Isa. 51:21. Sometimes the word means "humble" or "lowly," as it does in Zech. 9:9, where it describes the Messiah: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass..." (cf. Ps. 18:27; Prov. 3:34; Isa. 66:2). (Vine's # 6041)

This word describes someone who is "*poor weak, afflicted, possibly even disabled and in distress, living from day to day on a limited means and possibly even being oppressed.*" We would generally consider such a person to be in terrible straits. Yet this one knows "*how to walk among the living.*" He is not like the man above, who was wise enough to live 2,000 years, have many children but was never satisfied. This man knows how to be satisfied. This one knows how to live his life among the living.

His wisdom has given him the ability to get along with people and to be satisfied. Since no one can ever be satisfied for if one is so rich he can't even count it all or so poor he doesn't know where his next meal is coming from, there is very little difference in the feelings of dissatisfaction in the hearts of both. Neither one is going to feel comfortable or satisfied with what they have, both wish they had more. Therefore what is the difference between the two? Why should the one be sought after? From the standpoint of having or not having, rich and poor, fool or wise are both in the same position.

The difference then must be in the term "know." This poor man has "*observed*" and "*experienced.*" He has taken the time to "*experience with the senses.*" He has been "*investigating and proving,*" then thought about it all carefully through "*reflection and consideration.*"

yadá, "to know." This verb occurs in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Phoenician, Arabic (infrequently), biblical Aramaic, and in Hebrew in all periods. This verb occurs about 1,040 times (995 in Hebrew and 47 in Aramaic) in the Bible. Essentially *yadá* means: (1) to know by observing and reflecting (thinking), and (2) to know by experiencing. ... In contrast to this knowing through reflection is the knowing which comes through experience with the senses, by investigation and proving, by reflection and consideration (firsthand knowing).... Consequently *yadá* is used in synonymous parallelism with "hear" Exod. 3:7, "see" Gen. 18:21, and "perceive, see" Job 28:7. ... Thirdly, this verb can represent that kind of knowing which one learns and can give back... In addition to the essentially cognitive knowing already presented, this verb has a purely experiential side. The "knower" has actual involvement with or in the object of the knowing. ... (Vines # 3045)

This gives the poor man more than the man above. It should be the real quest for all "under the sun." It ultimately leads one back to God.

So the point of the comparison appears to be that in the realm of satisfaction, there is no difference between the wise and the fool and between the rich and the poor. Only the one who accepts the truth that satisfaction must begin and end only with food has any real advantage.

That this is the proper interpretation seems clear as we consider his concluding thoughts.

9. Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire.

This proverb captures the essence of the above. Rich or poor, wise or fool, if one can learn this truth, they can be happy “*under the sun.*” All must learn how to be content with whatever they have. This is such an important truth that it is repeated three times in the NT.

*Let your conduct be without covetousness; **be content with such things as you have.** For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” Heb 13:5*

*Not that I speak in regard to need, for **I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:** Phil 4:11-12*

*Now **godliness with contentment is great gain.** 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And **having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.** 1 Tim 6:6-9*

The term “better” is the same “goodness” that was used in verse 3 and 6. It refers to things that make one “glad,” “joyful,” and “merry.” Things that are “bountiful,” “pleasant,” and “sweet.” Things are much more pleasant and sweet when we have them. Thus we must learn the joy and gladness that can be gained simply from what we can see with our eyes.

It is unwise to allow the dissatisfaction of the soul to make us want more than we presently have. We must not allow our “desire” to wander. The term translated “*desire*” was also used in 6:3, 7 and translated “*soul*” It is the “*essence of life,*” “*the inner self,*” “*what one is to oneself*” as opposed to “*what one appears to be to one’s observers.*” We must not allow the essence of our life which does not want to be satisfied to wander. It can lead to being unhappy with everything. Here is why covetousness is so ardently condemned. It leads one further and further from happiness and satisfaction. It must not be allowed to wander. This is the general term in Hebrew for “*movement.*” It is translated “*to go, walk, behave*” and generally has the “*sense of going*”

halak, “to go, walk, behave.” ... Old Testament Hebrew attests it about 1,550 times, while the Aramaic uses it a few times. Essentially, this root refers to movement without any suggestion of direction in the sense of going, whether of man Gen. 9:23, beasts Gen. 3:14, or inanimate objects Gen. 2:14-- ... *halak* may be translated “to go.” (Vine’s #1980)

We must learn to stay at home with what we have, instead of wandering and going from place to place in our minds to what we could have. We must firmly resist the temptation to believe we would be happier with different possessions. God wants us to be content with the wife of **our** youth, **our** children, **our** homes and possessions, **our** lot in life. The soul will constantly move us to go in other directions and we must firmly stand against it for it is not wisdom but folly. It’s ultimate end is total dissatisfaction with everything. Even if we got there, we would have been better off to be an untimely birth.

What one has is certainly much better than allowing the seat of the affections to walk and go forth wherever it might desire. Once the desires of the heart are allowed to freely travel about, it is difficult to ever be content with what one has. Every realm where we do this will lead us to sin and wretchedness. There are always so many things one can be captivated by. It is a road that has no end. Learn to be satisfied with what you can see (what you already have), and not to be flitting from one desire to the next by allowing your desires to fix on one thing and another. This is certainly a difficult thing to accomplish. But it is well worth the effort.

This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

This “*wandering of the soul*” (“*the inner self,*” “*what one is to oneself*” as opposed to “*what one appears to be to one’s observers.*”) is vanity. It leads to greater and greater desire and lessor and lessor return. It is a bubble, futile, empty worthless and meaningless. It is a dead end path. The very epitome of:

There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. Pr. 14:12

This is another one of the multitude of things “under the sun” which when closely examined does not yield what they promise and are thus vanity. It is insignificant and worthless, transient and frail, it is empty and fruitless. Just grasping after the wind. You know you have it when nothing satisfies

you any more.

10. Whatever one is, he has been named already. For it is known that he is man; (NKJV)

Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; (NAS)

That which hath been is named already, and it is know that it is man: (KJV)

Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago; and it is known what man is; (ASV)

Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, (ESV)

Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; (NIV)

I give the renderings of the other translations to manifest the latitude the translators had in translating the Hebrew. But if we carefully consider them all the main emphasis is the same. It is a return to the thought offered at the beginning of this book.

That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after. Eccl. 1:9-11

Thus whether we understand his exact and specific meaning here due to difficulties in translation is kept to a minimum since we cannot miss the broad and basic point. No matter what you are doing, no matter what you are in regard to occupation, or in regard to morality or simply the major emphasis of your life, you are not the first one on this earth to have such ideas or to have taken such a path.

Each of us is only one more in a long line of humanity that has walked this earth since its beginning. There is nothing special about our outlooks or our activities, we are only another of many. When one looks at life in this way, it removes from it the ability to take pride in what one is doing. I am not the first and I will not be the last to take this approach (whatever the approach might be). That being so, it would be much wiser on my part to take an approach which leads to happiness and contentment. Especially when the conclusion of this thought is brought out.

There is just so much to man. God created him that way and that is how it is. God created man with the basic need to eat and drink. He made man with the basic drives of his life. Sin destroyed and ruined all that man could have been and left him a mere shell. His soul which had been designed for such great purposes must now be carefully controlled lest the flesh take it over and lead him to binge again and again on things that will destroy him. We may not like all this, but it is the truth!

And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.

“Contend” is a broad term for “judge,” “plead,” “debate,” or “wrangle.”

“... to judge; to plead, to debate; to strive, to wrangle... strife, discord: a man of contention may be taken, either actively of one ready to contend, or passively of one who is liable to contentions with and from others...” (Wilson p 94-95)

“*diy*n or (Gen. 6:3) *duwn*- 1) to judge, to contend, to plead a) (Qal) 1) to act as judge, to minister judgment 2) to plead a cause 3) to execute judgment, to requite, to vindicate 4) to govern 5) to contend, to strive ...” (BDB # 1777)

Man cannot argue with God, he cannot debate, strive or wrangle with Him. It is folly to do so because God is “mightier.”

“... one that has superior, overbearing strength...” (Wilson p 275-276)

God is superior in wisdom, knowledge, strength, and power. There is no realm in which a man can fight against God and win. One might rebel against his laws, his code of righteousness, and his means for making man happy, but in the final tally, it is man who will be broken against God and not the opposite.

Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, "He did not make me"? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"? Isa 29:16

*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
1Cor. 1:25*

Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged." Rom 3:4

The point is simply this. No one has ever lived who has won his battle against God, no one has ever lived and found happiness in seeking things in rebellion against Him. No one ever has, and no one ever will. So why fight God? Why seek for happiness in areas where He says it cannot be found? Multitudes have tried before us and failed. Why rebel against His commands and ordinances? Simply learn to live within God's system. That is the only way to be happy in this life under the sun.

11. Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better?

Seeing there are many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? (ASV)

For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man? (NASB)

The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? (ESV)

The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? (NIV)

Again, a difficulty in translation presents itself. The term "**things**" can also be translated "**words**" With this difference comes a difference in understanding the sense. The term is defined "speech," "a word," "a thing," or even "business, occupation, acts, matter, case,"

1697 dabar- speech, a word, speaking, a thing a) speech b) a saying, an utterance c) a word, words d) business, occupation, acts, matter, case, something, manner (by extension) (BDB)

Thus the term could be accurately translated with either word. It all depends on what the Holy Spirit was referring back to. If He was continuing the idea of "*contending with the almighty*" in the previous verse, then "**words**" would be His thought. There are many words spoken in contending with God, but they all increase vanity and futility.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: 2 "Who is this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Job 38:1-3

Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said: 2 "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it." Job 40:1-3

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: 7 "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: 8 "Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Job 40:6-8

If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. Ps 73:15

The writer of Ecclesiastes had already drawn this same conclusion earlier in the book.

*Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up **a matter** in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your **words** be few. Ecc 5:2*

Yet it is equally true that man's has an inability to be satisfied with "*things*." With the addition of many things in a man's possession there comes the increase of vanity. The more one has, the more trials they bring. They actually work the exact opposite of what one would think. One would think that the more one had, the better things would be for them, but it is not so. Hence how is man better if he has them?

Look again at the bolded words in 5:2. Though the translators used both "*a matter*" and "*words*" they are the same same **dabar** that was used here. Hence either way fits the context, either way is scripturally sound, and either way has already been discussed in this book. The reader is left to choose for himself which one he feels best fits the context. Man is not bettered by arguing and contending with God. The more words the more muddled it gets. Man is not bettered by gaining things. It leads to heartache and dissatisfaction. How then is man the better?

12. For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

These final words of the chapter form the conclusion. He asks two different questions.

1. Who knows what is good for man?
2. Who can tell us what will happen in this world once we leave it?

These are rhetorical questions. Their answers direct the paths of all. The first answer is God. God knows what is good for man and God can tell us exactly what will happen after we leave. But few are satisfied with that answer. The other is for each one to seek for himself what is good and never even answer the second question at all as being irrelevant. All young people wrestle with this as they consider what to do with their lives, and all old men wrestle with whether or not they made the right decisions.

These two questions form the heart of what makes men do what they do. They feel that it is good for them to do it, and/or they feel that it will have a good affect on those who will come after them. Many have chosen their lives vocation on the answer to this question. Many have found self-esteem from thinking their answer was right. People want to believe that what they are doing is good to be doing and good for them to do. They want to believe that it will have a good affect on those who live after them (primarily their children and hopefully others as well). But as the question is posed, all feel the nagging doubt as to whether it really is or not. Is what we are giving our children really going to benefit them, is what we are doing really good? Who can tell us such a thing? Who really knows it? The answer to both of the above ultimately leads a man to God. Only an eternal God who created man and has his own purposes in doing so can answer the above questions. No one else possibly could.

If we answer these questions with God then we begin with a great advantage. An advantage that surpasses age and experience.

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. 98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts. 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. 102 I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. Ps 119:97-105

If we seek to find it out for ourselves, we will enter many dead ends and like all others who took the path "out of the presence of the LORD," will find only "vanity of vanity" and "a striving after wind."

all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow?

In these words are found the true reason for serving God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and might! This life is vain, it soon vanishes away, it is insignificant and worthless, it is transient and frail, it is empty and fruitless. It passes like a shadow. It is so quick, and so transitory that a shadow which cannot be touched, felt, smelled, tasted or in anyway even seen is used to illustrate it. What a sad lot man has been given due to the sinful rebellion he has chosen to walk in. In reaching out for the knowledge of good and evil, he lost all hope of knowing even why he is here and what his purpose is. He lost all ability to even know what good is, and to know how to best conduct himself.

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. Jer. 10:23

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; Pr. 3:5