

Introduction

1. Pleasure cannot bring true satisfaction (vv. 1-11). Prior to the affirming of this, Solomon had concluded that education leads to terrible sorrow (1:12-18).

2. Since the possession of wisdom only increases inward conflicts, is there a difference between wisdom and folly? Does wisdom indeed excel folly? This is the basic concern of the writer at this point.

3. To get at the root of the matter, Solomon proposes three major investigations.

1. The FATE of men vv. 12-17.

a. It is related v. 12.

The Hebrew verb for "turned" means to turn clear around. In doing so, Solomon investigated three areas: wisdom, madness, and folly. He weighed each against the other (cf. 1:17). As a king, he had every means at his disposal, his keen observation remarked that no one would come up with a different experience than his.

b. It is explained vv. 13, 14.

Solomon notes that wisdom overrides folly as light is over darkness. Wisdom is over folly because a wise man has eyes in his head, while a person of folly walks in darkness. To be wise is like light (Psa. 36:10). To have folly is darkness (Job 38:19). But even with this difference, it is recorded that both wisdom and folly terminate alike.

c. It is stated vv. 15, 16.

Clearly Solomon wonders about the edge which wisdom has over folly. The same fate attends persons with both. That being the case, there is a leveling of all down to nothing. Everything becomes irrational and full of contradictions. He adds that even though some men are distinguished above others, there is little to distinguish between

hem after their burial. Death apparently sinks both the wise man and the fool in oblivion. There is a subtle sarcasm in the "how" of the phrase "how dieth the wise man?"

OTE: With the disclosure of the above, Solomon hated life (v. 17). The Hebrew phrase marks that an oppressing and repugnant burden lay over him. The LXX supports this concept. "Grievous" is a strong word. The goal of life was vain. The fruit of life was sin. He found all a bubble (cf. v. 11).

The LABOR of man vv. 18-23.

a. Recorded

The word for "labor" is noted at least six times in this section (vv. 18-22). It is used in the sense of arduous toil. There is severe effort and exhaustion involved. Other Hebrew words note the fruit (Gen. 4:12) and the effect (Isa. 32:17) of toil.

b. Transferred

Here is a tragic comment. All the toil of man is ultimately passed along to someone who has not actually worked (vv. 18, 19). Solomon may have alluded here to his own experience with his father (1 Chron. 28:9) and his own son Rehoboam (1 Kings 12; 14:21-31). All that one has honestly gained may well be squandered by one's successor. Thus, the use of wisdom, knowledge and equity (skill) to obtain is often just leaving one's product and efforts to a fool (v. 21).

c. Despaired

With the prospect of such a situation, Solomon was overcome with despair (v. 20). His spirit sank (cf. Job 6:26; Isa. 40:10). He gives up! The verb "went about" means to "turn about" to examine more carefully. He turned around to give up all his heart. Indeed, he had no more heart to labor! All he can conclude is that this situation is insupportable. The evil is greater in proportion to the care and labor he gave to gain everything. So what comes of it all? Three items are listed: sorrow (pain of mind, Psa. 102:10; Isa. 53:3), travail (used of a contentious and angry man, Prov. 21:19), and grief (speaks of affliction, distress, and wretchedness as an orphan, an exile, or one

abandoned, Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Isa. 58:7; Zech. 7:10).

3. The ENJOYMENT of man vv. 24-26.

a. Stated v. 24.

Since things are as described, it is best to just use the present in a way pleasant to oneself. But this is not to be a sluggard's life. The word "labor" shows that enjoyment is linked with toil. Nonetheless, it is God (the Hebrew word for "Mighty God," not the covenant-keeping God which would be the Tetragrammaton) actually makes the enjoyment possible. Man cannot give it to himself.

b. Established v. 25.

The dependence of enjoyment upon God is clearly affirmed. God alone can deliver man from avarice and make him capable of enjoyment. "Hasten" is the verb which means to eagerly pursue enjoyments. If Solomon failed to gain solid pleasure with all of his opportunities, no one else could possibly do it. This is his contention. It is, therefore, he says, best to enjoy the present as a gift of the Mighty God.

c. Compared v. 26.

The "good" man and the "sinner" man are compared in this final verse of the section. To the former, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to partake of what is provided for him. The sinner, however, unwittingly, actually gives what he has to the "good" man. He experiences travail in heaping and gathering, but he does not enter into his lot.

Conclusion Solomon has added to his already heavily marshalled evidence that this world has but vanity and vexation of spirit. The former word conveys the idea of "breath, emptiness, and vapor" while the latter connotes a striving after wind. What an evaluation of this world system! God give us a hunger for heaven and Christ! Amen.