

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-2/ecclesiastes-210-11/>

Solomon laments that his pursuit of pleasure and accomplishments do not result in lasting fulfillment.

Exploring the extent of *pleasure*, Solomon does not *refuse* himself anything. He allows his eyes to explore all they *desire* and his *heart* all it *pleased*.

The word for *labor* here is *amal*, which is often translated *toil* and means “the struggle of effort” (See notes on 1:3-7). Building/developing is a lot of work. Solomon has found that his *heart* is *pleased* with the effort of his *labor* and that this *pleasure* is a reward, an output, for his *toil*.

The things Solomon “labored” over brought him joy, which was a *reward* in itself. There are many things we do that are not necessarily easy, but result in great satisfaction when completed.

After reflecting on the joy of his many labors, Solomon shifts his focus to evaluate his labors in the context of true *profit*. Solomon *considered all* of his *activities* which *his hands had done and the labor that he had exerted*. The word translated *considered* basically means to “turn”—thus, he “turned his attention” from one perspective to another.

Solomon has “turned” to evaluate his *works/activities*—the product of his own labors. Solomon considered *all* his *activities*. The word *activities* connects this focus to the introduction of Solomon’s overall concern in [Ecclesiastes 1:13](#), namely, the task of seeking and exploring all that has been done under heaven, or *under the sun*. In [Ecclesiastes 1:13-14](#), the words *done* and *works* are from the same root word as *activities* and *done* in [Ecclesiastes 2:11](#).

Solomon wants to know if there is any lasting *profit* from his *activities*. What difference will they make? It seems clear he is now changing from evaluating how his *activities* made him feel—he liked them—to asking what difference his *activities* made in the greater scheme of things. He concludes they didn’t mean much. They are *vanity* (hebel). Like trying to grasp vapor. *There was no profit under the sun*. Solomon has now created a distinction between how

something makes his heart feel and what difference it makes in the external world, whether it has any lasting value or *profit*.

The word for *profit* will be used several times later in the book in very positive ways (the first will be in 2:13). Solomon could have said in this passage, “I saw personal profit but no lasting profit.” This dual use of “profit” is just one of many indications that Solomon is evaluating his life from two different perspectives. From the standpoint of what he had accomplished (his own *activities*) and the possessions he had amassed, he concludes that his life had been enriched; he enjoyed it. The efforts gave him a *reward*. However, from the standpoint of seeing within these things a rationale for everything in life, he is stumped.

Both of these conclusions are valid. Both are from the perspective of Solomon’s supernaturally granted wisdom.

Solomon concludes his labors created *no profit under the sun*. Taking into account passages elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, it seems likely Solomon’s reasoning went something like this: It was rewarding to accomplish something difficult. But if we want that reward again we have to start something else difficult. We are back in the hamster wheel. A cycle without end. And that is *vanity* (hebel).

Solomon wants to know that his labors have made a lasting difference. He will soon tell us that he realizes that all of man’s labors will eventually decay and go to ruin. The wise and the foolish all have the same fate. If they are remembered at all, it will only be a passing memory. Solomon had joy in a moment, but on reflection realized that moment will pass, and fade out of memory, only to be replaced by the moments of others. So what difference (profit) did it make?

Once again, he finds all of this to be *vanity* (see notes on [Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)) and a *striving after wind*. While the joy he experiences is genuine joy, it is temporal, inadequate. It does not answer the compulsion to understand meaning.

In chapter 1, he started by claiming everything is “vaporous” or *vanity*. By the end of the chapter, he adds an additional claim—everything was *striving after the wind*. Solomon is evoking a Hebraic practice in which repetition represents emphasis. He now adds another metaphor, *no profit under the sun*. This further emphasizes his thesis. The way Hebrews would express the concept of “great” is by saying “good, good, good”. The listing of three synonymous

statements—*behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun*—is Solomon's strongest indictment thus far. He expresses the greatest extent of *futility*.

Solomon pronounces this dire indictment immediately after he acknowledges the *pleasure* and *reward* he receives from his *labor*. He discovered *pleasure in his labor* but it did not rescue his *labor* from *vanity*. It may have even added to it.

There is both an element of hope and a bit of a punch in the gut in these verses. Solomon will later conclude that some joy is better than no joy. But at this point, he is still trying to make sense of it all through his experience of pleasure, and is coming up short.

Biblical Text:

¹⁰ All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.no profit under the sun.