

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-5/ecclesiastes-518-20/>

Life is not meaningless or joyless. Joy is something we can choose. God has given us an allotment to steward.

Solomon concludes that it is *good* and *fitting* (appropriate) to *eat, to drink, and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him*. In fact, enjoying the production of work is *his reward*. Hoarding wealth is futile. It does you no good and then you leave it behind. Better to enjoy the benefits of what you earn.

In earlier chapters, Solomon made it clear that seeking pleasure would not lead to fulfillment. However, through the paradox of faith, we can gain great benefit from living in gratitude to God for the gift of life. Rather than thinking we'll only be happy with things we don't have, we can enjoy what we do have, which transforms the "hebel" (vapor, see 1:2) of life into an opportunity.

The word for *fitting* is "yapheh," which means "beautiful" or "fair". The *good and fitting* things are *to eat, to drink, and enjoy oneself in one's toil*. *Enjoy* and *eat* are literal translations of the Hebrew. *Enjoy oneself* is the Hebrew phrase "ra'ah towb", which literally means "see the good." Metaphorically, these three admonitions encourage us to eat, drink, and enjoy a proper perspective. Soak in the truth. *See the good*.

Consistent with the cycles of life Solomon observed, he once again has cycled back to make this core point. It is futile to seek to find meaning and purpose through reason or experience, including the experience of pleasure. But we can gain great benefit through living in gratitude for God's goodness, seeing the good in all He has made. Thanksgiving leads us to enjoyment. Happiness on earth is a product of having a proper perspective that is rooted in faith. Choosing the right perspective transcends the reality of the mystery and uncertainty of life. Faith and a proper perspective allows us to enjoy the most common of activities, to *eat* food, *drink* drinks and *enjoy work*.

Man toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him. So it is important to make our opportunity on the earth count for the short duration of our lifetime. Our lives are a short ride that James calls "a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). That

means we should have a sense of urgency to “*see the good*” and gain our fullest *reward* from our *toils*. The only opportunity to gain our fullest reward is rooted in a proper perspective. Faith will be the foundation for our highest *reward*. This is true not just of the next life, but also life on earth. Solomon makes it clear that pursuing a faith-based life of gratitude is God’s *reward* now.

It is common throughout the Bible for *reward* and punishment to include earthly circumstances along with heavenly rewards. Our choices have consequences. When we follow God’s ways, we have good consequences. That doesn’t mean we have no problems. The world is still fallen. And it doesn’t eliminate the mystery of life (the “hebel”). But obedience produces peace. Solomon began this book by seeking to find inner peace using reason and experience financed with a near limitless “bank account.” And he didn’t find it. The great *reward* Solomon has now found is a consequence of living in gratitude.

Furthermore (v. 19) emphasizes what has already been said. *Every man to whom God has given wealth and riches* has also been *empowered*. The man must make the choice about what to do with these *riches* and treasures. God has *empowered* him *to eat from them (riches) and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor*. Life has fulfillment. What we are doing makes sense, because we are stewarding it as a gift of God.

Riches are not inherently evil. However, there are common problems that spring from having wealth: a false perspective, inaccurate assumptions, and the distraction from faithfulness. These can corrupt a rich person. And these are choices. We have another choice. Enjoy these *treasures* properly. Misused, they are a heavy weight that can destroy us. Used rightly, they are an opportunity to experience joy and stewardship.

This is the gift of God. In all the *toil* and *vanity* (see notes on Ecclesiastes 1:3), God has granted this reprieve: stewardship. We can celebrate the task of faithfully doing, enjoying, and being what God has called us to. While seeking purpose from the world around us through reason and experience leads to despair, *seeing the good* and viewing life as a *gift* leads to the ability to *enjoy* our lives.

God *keeps* the good steward *occupied* with *gladness of his heart*. If we are *occupied* in stewarding and celebrating what *God* has given in gratitude, our *reward* will be *gladness of heart*. The opposite of the consequence experienced by the hoarder. Fulfillment is not found through reason and

experience. It is found from choosing a true perspective rooted in faith. Faith frees us from the futility of trying to extract purpose from the massive, incomprehensible evidence of our circumstantial surroundings.

It is *the gift of God* for anyone who has sufficient resources to have plenty to *eat*, and to *rejoice in his labor*. To enjoy what they do. This is the great *gift* that should attend *every man to whom God has given riches and wealth*. In fact, if this man who has *riches and wealth* views the enjoyment of life as *his reward*, living in gratitude, he will *not often consider the years of his life*. In other words, gratitude will keep him from dreading death. Because *God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart*.

Gratitude allows us the great *reward* of rejoicing in our *labor*, the works of our hands. When we view whatever opportunities we have as a *gift from God*, and steward that gift, rather than hoarding it, it leads to *gladness*.

Biblical Text:

¹⁸ Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.¹⁹ Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.²⁰ For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.