

Ecclesiastes 5:9-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-5/ecclesiastes-59-12/>

A love of money and dependence on wealth robs the rich of contentment. But work leads to contentment.

The phrase *After all* is added by translators. Many translations connect verse 9 to verse 8 and the discussion of justice. However, verse 9 seems to fit better with the discussion of economics that follows. Verse 9 can be rendered “Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field.” The point being that all wealth comes from the earth. Even a king cannot gain wealth that does not ultimately come from the earth. In this respect, all humans are alike.

However, all humans are alike in another way: *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.* Solomon states an immense irony: one who *loves money* will never have enough, so will never be *satisfied*. The love of *money* leads to an addiction that destroys. The Apostle Paul states a similar sentiment in his first letter to Timothy, “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Although the earth is vast, there is not enough treasure in it to satisfy the lust for “more.” Solomon emphasizes the point by restating it in another manner: *he who loves abundance* will also *not be satisfied with its income*. The man who has an *abundance* of assets will generate a lot of *income*. But he will *not be satisfied with* the *income* from his investments. He will always want more.

This is *vanity*. Chasing money to bring happiness will never bring happiness. It is chasing after the wind. Accumulating possessions will never lead us to be *satisfied*.

Solomon concludes *this too is vanity* (see notes on [Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)). But the *vanity* increases. Added *income* leads to escalated spending. When the economy expands, *those who consume* the added wealth *increase*. The population expands due to the increased prosperity. Now there are more people who want more. And that just means more unhappy people striving after the wind. Once again, Solomon observes that when humans seek

meaning and purpose through reason and experience, it always ends up in the same place: *this too is vanity*, vapor, futility.

After noting: *When good things increase, those who consume them increase*, Solomon asks a rhetorical question: *So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?* Even though this is phrased as a question, it seems to be making a statement, that there isn't much the *owner* of the appreciating investment can do but to *look on* and watch the increased population consume his assets.

What Solomon might have in mind is the nature of an expanding enterprise. Using a modern analogy, profits are invested in expansion, which means more employees. More employees mean more expenses. And more investment. Often the enterprise eats cash rather than producing dividends. Often increased wealth is on paper, and not really available for the money-lover to spend. Not that spending would make him happy. It seems there is *vanity* everywhere you look.

All one can do is watch. Just *look on*, presumably in angst, at seeing his assets dwindle. Meanwhile, the *working man* is perfectly happy. *The sleep of the working man is pleasant. The working man* expends his energy pursuing industry, goes to bed tired, and has a *sleep* that is *pleasant*. This is the case *whether he eats little or much*. He may go to bed hungry, but he still goes to bed tired after a full day of work, and sleeps well. By contrast, *the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep*.

The contrast is stark. The *rich man* has plenty to eat but is unable to *sleep*. The *working man* has a *pleasant sleep whether he eats little or much*. The *rich man* might *look on* as his wealth is *consumed* by his entourage and servants. Spending money to produce happiness will not produce happiness, but it will dissipate wealth.

The word for *working man* is "abad," literally *servant*. Solomon has said before that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work ([Eccl 5:18](#)). The man who *serves* sleeps pleasantly, *whether he eats little or much*. Service and enjoying the work God has given us leads to contentment.

On the other hand, indulgence leads to misery. *The full stomach of the rich does not allow him to sleep*. The picture might be that the *rich man* gorges himself with luxuries, and the rich food upsets his stomach and robs his sleep. Or perhaps he is anxious with worry about losing his wealth, or loses sleep from anxiously plotting to gain more. It could be all the above, which would

certainly reflect Paul's description of money-lovers piercing themselves with many griefs ([1 Timothy 6:10](#)).

Biblical Text:

⁹ After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

¹⁰ He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance *with its* income. This too is vanity. ¹¹ When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? ¹² The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.