

# Ecclesiastes 6:10-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-6/ecclesiastes-610-12/>

*A full understanding of the reality of humanity resides with God alone. Apart from God, any attempt to explain the meaning of existence is futile.*

This paragraph marks a major change of thought in the book. The phrase “striving after the wind” occurred in [Ecclesiastes 6:9](#) for the last time, and labor/toiling ceases to be a focal point. Solomon now replaces his emphasis on work and labor with an emphasis on man’s incomplete knowledge. Humans have an inability to know certain things about our present experience. And humans know next to nothing about the future.

As Solomon brings Chapter 6 to a close, he reminds us of the sovereignty of God. Humans are created beings. When we try to function independently, we find *vanity*. Futility. It’s like trying to grab vapor. Solomon tells us *it is known what man is. Whatever exists has already been named*. The act of naming shows ownership and dominion over the named object, as well as accurate understanding of it. This means God fully understands what man is. There is something intimate about naming. God knows us intimately.

Here, *naming* is used as a metaphor for purpose and identity (as it was earlier in the chapter). Everything in God’s world is there for a purpose. It has been called and named. *It is known what man is*. God knows us and knows the plan and outcome of our lives. Even if that truth eludes the man himself. *For he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he* (literally, “he cannot judge against the mighty one”).

The word for *him who is stronger* (mighty one) is “taqqiyph” and this is the only time it is used in Scripture. The known man has no choice but to fall under the authority of “the mighty one.” He cannot judge God or override God’s might. No matter how many *words* a person may produce in the attempt to explain human existence, they only increase the vapor—they just “cloud” the issue. *Many words increase futility* (“hebel,” see notes on [Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)).

Solomon then asks, *what then is the advantage to man?* Two questions follow this question, each effectively making an assertion that tells us why the answer is “There is no advantage to man.”

The first reason there is no *advantage to man* is that no one can *know* for sure what is absolutely the best (*good*) course of action *during his lifetime*. Humans are finite and cannot obtain comprehensive knowledge. It is *futile* (“hebel,” vapor) to try to live as though this is not reality during the *few years* we live on earth (*under the sun*). We are finite creatures with infinity in our hearts.

The second reason there is no *advantage to man* is that our days are fleeting and we *spend* (lit. “make or manufacture”) them like a *shadow*. A shadow reflects, but does not have real substance. Like the appearance of vapor. No matter what we produce in this life, it will not last on this earth. All will decay. All will be forgotten. Eventually, this earth will perish.

Apart from God, humanity is full of futility. The human existence is futile. All humans produce is futile. All meaning and purpose is ultimately derived within and from God.

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>10</sup> Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.<sup>11</sup> For there are many words which increase futility. What *then* is the advantage to a man? <sup>12</sup>For who knows what is good for a man during *his* lifetime, *during* the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?**