

# Ecclesiastes 6:7-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-6/ecclesiastes-67-9/>

*Trying to find happiness through satisfying appetites is futile. It is better, more effective, and more fulfilling, to maintain an external focus rather than be controlled by internal desires.*

Solomon returns to the vaporous dissatisfaction of *labor*. Everything we do is done with the aim of providing our basic needs, the most basic of which is to provide food for our *mouth*. Yet, the *appetite* is never full. The word translated *appetite* is “nephesh,” which can also be translated “soul.” “Nephesh” means “life of a creature.” We feed our *mouth* but our “soul” is not satisfied. Solomon is now pointing out another reality of life: true satisfaction never comes through the satisfaction of an *appetite*.

Roughly five hundred years after Solomon, some Greek philosophers made a core pillar of their philosophy the observation that satisfying appetites does not bring true happiness. For example, in the written work “Gorgias,” Plato has Socrates argue against the idea that happiness comes from the fulfillment of desires, or appetites. He argues that were this true, the happiest man would be a leper, because he continually has the “pleasure” of fulfilling the desire to scratch an itch.

When it comes to seeking happiness from fulfilling desires, the *wise man* has no *advantage over the fool*. Neither can find happiness through the seeking of pleasure. Solomon is cycling back to one of the core lessons from Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

Self-seeking is self-destructive.

Neither does *the poor man* have an advantage because he knows *how to walk before the living*. The phrase *walk before the living* could refer to the street smarts the poor man develops knowing how to make do. Another translation renders this, “And what advantage does a pauper gain by knowing how to survive?” The fact that someone knows how to live in hunger, to do without, doesn’t solve the basic issue either. They can still be ruled by their appetites, and live in dissatisfaction.

Any focus on living for appetite leads to slavery and misery. This is a heart condition that cannot be solved by circumstances. Seeking happiness through satisfaction of appetites is *striving after wind*.

Solomon adds that *what the eyes see is better than what the soul desires*. Another translation renders this “Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don’t have.” When we live to satisfy appetites, our appetites end up becoming our masters. The key to happiness is to discover contentment in what is. Rather than defining happiness as fulfilling something our *soul desires*, be content with *what our eyes can see*—what we already have.

This makes complete logical sense. If we define happiness as gaining something we don’t have, something our *soul desires*, then we will never be happy. Once we obtain something our *soul desires*, it can no longer make us happy. We have to now chase some other thing our *soul desires*. Much better to be content with what we have. To enjoy what our *eyes see*. Then happiness can be our normative state.

*Futility and striving after wind* is an apt description for a life lived in constant pursuit of fulfilling an appetite that will only grow its demands. But we can live a fulfilled life by being thankful for what we have, what our eyes see, being grateful for where we are and the stewardship we have been granted.

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>7</sup>All a man’s labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.<sup>8</sup>For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What *advantage* does the poor man have, knowing *how* to walk before the living? <sup>9</sup>What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.**