

Studies in Ecclesiastes (20)

The Vanity of Discontentment

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Today, we continue our study in the book of Ecclesiastes. We are in the midst of Solomon's various and proverbial observations about life – with is vain and what is of genuine value. In this chapter we find the blessedness of contentment.

Contentment is a subject we have addressed on numerous occasions (1 Timothy 6:6-10, Philippians 4:10-12, Hebrews 13:5, etc.) – it is one of the fundamental attitudes we need to live God centered lives. I am not going to preach another sermon here on our need to be content. It is my hope we understand that based on recent studies.

In this chapter, Solomon observed some vanities when one chooses to live without this contentment. Let us notice this chapter and simply make some observations about it.

I. The vanity of discontentment (1-9)

- a. **Described as an evil under the sun** (1) – another expression meaning hopelessness and vanity as used here. The word “evil” is found some 18 times in the NKJV of this book. Many times, it is similar to this expression and Solomon sees the futility of trusting in this life.

Why does he call trusting in this life *evil*? The things of this are so unstable and they fail to give TRUE and meaningful satisfaction. Even if some are content with what they have, they are typically the exception.

- b. **A man with great riches, but he cannot enjoy it** (2) – describes one who is abundantly blessed and prosperous. He “has it all” – power, fame and fortune (think of many of our celebrities). He has the resources to do whatever he wants.

OR SO HE THINKS! God does not give him the power to enjoy and use it.

NOTE: Do not read into this, that God has a direct hand every time (while he CAN do such, and if you think about Solomon, He did – 2 Chronicles 1:11-12 – Solomon asked for wisdom, which God granted, along with wealth, power and fame). God has blessed us enough in this world that most can enjoy great things (cf. Matthew 5:45 – God makes His sun rise on the evil and the good).

A foreigner consumes it - THINGS, power and fame are uncertain. In previous chapters we have noted the folly of inheritance – ungrateful children and others who waste it after you’re dead. Here it is a foreigner – someone you don’t INTEND to enjoy it – but he does.

1) Perhaps a captor – someone who takes it from you by force.

2) Unforeseen circumstances – an illness (maybe a virus or pandemic), economic collapse, that depletes you of what you have

3) Family or marital problems – think of the devastation of an ugly divorce, or selfish family members who constantly drain you of everything.

The POINT – riches are uncertain (1 Timothy 6:17). You can lose everything (that was the point of James 4:13-16).

- c. **How many children you have doesn't change it** (3-5) – a large family doesn’t guarantee happiness. Jewish society saw blessing in children – Psalm 127:3-5, consider barren women whom God finally blessed (cf. Luke 1:24-25).

Solomon notes, even if you have 100 children, that doesn’t guarantee happiness. With all of his wives and concubines (which numbered 100), Solomon had problems.

Consider the resources required to provide for such. And more doesn’t guarantee faithfulness and gratitude. Solomon paints the tragic picture of one who has no burial – likely meaning a respected

burial (NASB – *proper* burial) – again, think of selfish children who only care about how much inheritance they will receive – they fight with each other. They can't wait to get you in the ground. OR there is the unforeseen circumstances where one literally is not buried.

NOTE by comparison how bad Solomon says this is – a stillborn child is better off than one who suffers this “evil”. We grieve over the loss of an infant or a child stillborn and it is VERY tragic. But spiritually, that child will not experience the evils of this world, temptations and sins. Instead, they are SAFE in the arms of God and our Lord.

ANOTHER NOTE – Solomon qualifies who this man is – “*his soul is not satisfied with goodness...*” here is one who is not a godly parent and driven by material success. He leaves God out of the picture and SO DO HIS CHILDREN! 100 vs 1 ungrateful children are just as bad. The more you have doesn’t make it better.

- d. **How much time you have doesn't change it** (6) The young and middle aged typically look for ways to extend their lives. But have you noticed how many elderly people are ready to move on - they've been around long enough and see death as relief, a release. You see someone who maybe hits the century mark. Imagine living 2000 years – if you live a miserable and selfish life, TIME WILL NOT CHANGE THAT! Why live 2000 years in misery?

Also, Solomon's point is that even if you DO live that long, and even if you life sees goodness – you will go to the grave!

- e. **Hard work is never satisfied** (7) – the one lacking contentment, no matter how hard and how long he works, it is never enough. No matter what he achieves, he wants more.

How many are satisfied “for now” until they find something better they don't have yet?

They enjoy a vacation, but then they see somewhere else more spectacular and want it.

They finally get that “toy” (related to their hobby) they have been working for and are happy with it, UNTIL they see a better one on the internet and now they want it.

Their new car is awesome, until next year's features come out.

The point – if you do not have a contented mindset, it doesn't matter how hard you work or how much you have, you will not be satisfied.

- f. **Wisdom doesn't help** (8) – you can have the finest education that gets the bigger salary and helps you go places. You can be extremely smart (like Solomon) and that doesn't guarantee happiness.

Solomon mentions the poor man who know how to walk before the living. Have you ever seen or talked with an old, country man who never graduated from high school, and has lived a simple life, but he has great common sense – something no amount of education can buy.

Paul warned about the foolishness of the wisdom of this world – 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, not many wise according to the flesh are called... God has made the wisdom of this world foolish (1:20)

John in 1 John 2:15-17 warned about the pride of life (which would include worldly wisdom) that is passing away. We are not to love such.

James 3:15-16 describes the wisdom of this world – sensual, demonic, and full of envy and selfishness.

- g. **Wishing doesn't help** (9) – Better is what you see right now, that a mind that wandering with desire. Solomon is not saying that wishing for something is wrong, but how many DWELL on what they don't have and what they want?

If you want to go some place spectacular – GREAT! Work toward that end (if it is good), but FOR NOW, be satisfied where you are. Most will not get to do everything they want to do in this life. You can be bitter about it and ENVY those who get to go to that place, or you can be content right where you are.

Wishing alone doesn't accomplish anything. It too is vanity.

II. God over us (10-12)

- a. **Whatever one is, he is named already** (10) – WHY is it that the things and ways of this world do not bring lasting satisfaction? It is because you are NOT in control of the universe. There are things you cannot change. Among those things are God's plans – both spiritual and physical.

There are too many uncertainties in this life – disasters, pandemics that we cannot get a grasp of, just things that happen.

- b. **Can you contend with one mightier than you?** (10b-11) – Friends, you cannot contend against God and win! How many are bitter and blame God for their miseries, failures and whatever they don't have? Do you contend with God? Many passages warn against this: Romans 9:20-21 – clay doesn't argue with the potter:

Isaiah 45:9 warns, "*Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?*"

Job 40:1-4, Then Job answered the Lord and said: "Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." This is after the LORD appears and challenges Job. Earlier in the book, we find Job wanting to contend with God and ask why – no disrespect, but just his frustration (Job 23:1-5)

How are we better when we trust in things (words – NASB) and forget God? Again, you CANNOT win if you set your face against God, even if you with your worldly wisdom think you know more than He does.

So many today have rejected God because of the wisdom of men. Friends, I have devoted considerable time to establishing the existence of God and why the Bible is the word of God.

In my studies, I have come across MANY THINGS that I do not have answers for, or answers that fall short of what I would like, but that doesn't change the GREATNESS OF GOD!

Again, be reminded of the saying, "There are questions I cannot answer, but there are also answers that I cannot question." We do NOT know the ways or mind of God (Isaiah 55:8-9).

- c. **Who knows what is good for man in life?** Man certainly does not know his purpose without God revealing it to us. NOR can man know what is going to happen in the future. He can make plans, but they are uncertain. That is the whole point Solomon is seeking to drive home and our purpose throughout this study.

As we consider this book, let us never forget the conclusion – fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). May we in studies like these remind ourselves of what is really important – and that is preparing for our eternity. What about you? In what are you putting your trust today? If you are not ready to stand before God, why not take whatever steps are needed to change that. And, as always, we stand ready to help you in whatever way we can. Think about it!