

Biblical Soul Care
Lesson 7: The vanity of covetousness and the enjoyment of God
Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

Introduction: Solomon resumes the challenges to our enjoyment of life under the sun. He observes the joy killing effects of corrupt government officials, covetousness, and materialism. Thankfully, he ends this chapter with a God-centered worldview on wealth that is to be embraced by the hearer so that he may enjoy God and His gifts as he lives out this fleeting and vaporous life. This is a section of Scripture that fits well into the “put off/renew the mind/put on” motif of sanctification. Qoheleth dispenses wisdom on the subject of money as he continues to teach us through the sermon delivered to the Assembly.

Corrupt Government officials and the proper role of Government: 5:8-9

⁸ If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. ⁹ But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields. ESV

Truths in verse 8-

Truths in verse 9-

The successive tiers and levels of bureaucracy result in officials watching out for one another (vs 8). Mutual protection makes it difficult to root out corruption. The point Solomon makes is that a person ought not be shocked that such things exist within the bureaucracy - it is merely the outcome of fallen human nature. Government comes with a price. It is exactly what Samuel warned Israel about when they requested a King for themselves ‘like all the nations’ (1 Samuel 8:5). Samuel revealed that the ‘procedure of the king’ would involve pressing many citizens into royal service, the seizing of property, and taxation of crops and livestock. In the end, the people cry out to God because of the oppressive reign of their kings (1 Samuel 8:10-18). William Barrick

What is the relationship of the king to the cultivated field? Society benefits from a king under whose reign private owners might profitably cultivate the land rather than the king seizing it for royal use (Proverbs 29:4). The king ensures that justice prevails and that the boundaries of one's field remain in force (Proverbs 23:10-11). William Barrick

Rather than looking for the government to solve our problems, we need to acknowledge that even the best rulers fall short of perfection. Therefore, we live in the hope of a better administration—one that we do not find in Ecclesiastes but do find in the Gospel:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:6-7

Covetousness and the love of money: 5:10-12

¹⁰ He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. ¹¹ When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? ¹² Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. ESV

¹⁰ The one who loves money is never satisfied with money, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. This too is futile. ¹¹ When good things increase, the ones who consume them multiply; what, then, is the profit to the owner, except to gaze at them with his eyes? ¹² The sleep of the worker is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich permits him no sleep. HCSB

What truths are embedded in these verses?

Verse 10-

Verse 11-

Verse 12-

Materialism thwarts enjoyment of life: 5:13-17

¹³ There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, ¹⁴ and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. ¹⁵ As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷ Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

What truths are embedded in these verses?

Verse 13-

Verse 14-

Verse 15-

Verse 16-

Verse 17-

Solomon summarizes the many reasons not to live for money in verse 17: “Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.” This verse gives us a pathetic picture of where greed will lead. “If anything is worse than the addiction money brings, it is the emptiness it leaves.” (Derek Kidner) The miser will end up alone in his misery. Because he lives in spiritual darkness, his soul will be vexed with many anxieties. The ungodly pursuit of wealth will take its physical toll, leaving him in poor health. He will also be very angry---a bitter old man--- for who has ever heard of a happy miser? This gives us a helpful question to ask about our own anger, some of which may well be caused by an excessive love for the things of this world. When we get angry, what is the reason? The unsatisfied desire for worldly possessions is one powerful producer of anger. Ryken

Here is Randy Alcorn paraphrasing 5:10-15 in his book “The Treasure Principle” under the heading of “Chasing the Wind”:

- “Whoever loves money never has money enough” (v. 10). *The more you have, the more you want.*
- “Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income” (v. 10). *The more you have, the less you’re satisfied.*
- “As goods increase, so do those who consume them” (v. 11). *The more you have, the more people (including the government) will come after it.*
- “And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?” (v. 11). *The more you have, the more you realize it does no good.*
- “The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep” (v. 12). *The more you have, the more you have to worry about.*

- “I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner” (v. 13). *The more you have, the more you can hurt yourself by holding on to it.*
- “Or wealth lost through misfortune” (v. 14). *The more you have, the more you have to lose.*
- “Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so he departs” (v. 15). *The more you have, the more you will leave behind.*

Question: What are some Scriptures that speak to money and our relationship to it?

The less I spent on myself and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my soul become. Hudson Taylor

As thunder follows lightning, giving follows grace. When God’s grace touches you, you can’t help but respond with generous giving. Alcorn

Enjoy God and the fruit of your labor: 5:18-20

¹⁸ Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. ¹⁹ Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

What (or who) is the key word in this section? Defend your answer.

Embedded Truths:

Verse 18-

Verse 19-

Verse 20-

Qoheleth steps forward and says, “Yes, there is much misery and darkness in this life under the sun, but I have seen the good and the beautiful. It is significant that he uses the word “Beautiful” (ESV, “fitting”) because it hearkens back to 3:11, which said, “He is making all things beautiful in his time”. Part of God’s plan is that in a world of vexation, sickness, and anger, there is the good and beautiful. Each of us can still eat and drink and find enjoyment in the hard work God has given us to do. It is the life of faith and joy that lays hold of the brevity of life and sees it as a precious gift given by God that will soon be past (1 Timothy 6:17). Borgman

God is the source of whatever wealth we possess (Deut. 8:18; Proverbs 10:22). God is also the One who determined the “when” of wealth. He can give it. He can take it away. He can restore it, sustain it, increase it, or make it fly off never to be seen again. The power to receive it as a gift and then hold it loosely is also a gift. Borgman

The busyness of achievement for personal gain is misery. To be preoccupied with the pursuit for the sake of pursuit will suck joy out of life, give sleepless nights, and add grief upon grief. If anything can slow down life, it is misery. But the life that is enjoyed will go by quickly. The happier and more content we are, the more occupied we will be with the joys of life, and the more quickly it will pass by. But we should not want to trade the vapor of happiness in God for anything. So, enjoy the gifts but hold them loosely. Love the Giver more than the gifts, because when the gift goes away, the Giver remains.

