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Preface

**An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Book of Ecclesiastes**

We are still among Solomon's happy men, his happy servants, that *stood continually before him to hear his wisdom*; and they are the choicest of all the dictates of his wisdom, such as were more immediately given by divine inspiration, that are here transmitted to us, not to be heard, as by them, but once, and then liable to be mistaken or forgotten, and by repetition to lose their beauty, but to be read, reviewed, revolved, and had in everlasting remembrance. The account we have of Solomon's apostasy from God, in the latter end of his reign (1 Ki. 11:1), is the tragical part of his story; we may suppose that he spoke his *Proverbs* in the prime of his time, while he kept his integrity, but delivered his *Ecclesiastes* when he had grown old (for of the burdens and decays of age he speaks feelingly ch. 12), and was, by the grace of God, recovered from his backslidings. There he dictated his observations; here he wrote his own experiences; this is what days speak, and wisdom which the multitude of years teaches. The title of the book and the penman we shall meet with in the first verse, and therefore shall here only observe, I. That it is a sermon, a sermon in print; the text is (ch. 1:2), *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; that is the doctrine too; it is proved at large by many arguments and an induction of particulars, and divers objections are answered, and in the close we have the use and application of all, by way of exhortation, to *remember our Creator, to fear him, and to keep his commandments*. There are indeed many things in this book which are dark and hard to be understood, and some things which men of corrupt minds *wrest to their own destruction*, for want of distinguishing between Solomon's arguments and the objections of atheists and epicures; but there is enough easy and plain to convince us (if we will admit the conviction) of the vanity of the world, and its utter insufficiency to make us happy, the vileness of sin, and its certain tendency to make us miserable, and of the wisdom of being religious, and the solid comfort and satisfaction that are to be had in doing our duty both to God and man. This should be intended in every sermon, and that is a good sermon by which these points are in any measure gained. II. That it is a penitential sermon, as some of David's psalms are penitential psalms; it is a recantation-sermon, in which the preacher sadly laments his own folly and mistake, in promising himself satisfaction in the things of this world, and even in the forbidden pleasures of sense, which now he finds more bitter than death. His fall is a proof of the weakness of man's nature: *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, nor say, "I shall never be such a fool as to do so and so," when Solomon himself, the wisest of men, played the fool so egregiously; nor *let the rich man glory in his riches*, since Solomon's wealth was so great a snare to him, and did him a great deal more hurt than Job's poverty did him. His recovery is a proof of the power of God's grace, in bringing one back to God that has gone so far from him; it is a proof too of the riches of God's mercy in accepting him notwithstanding the many aggravations of his sin, pursuant to the promise made to David, that if his children should commit iniquity they should be corrected, but not abandoned and disinherited, 2 Sa. 7:14, 15. Let him therefore that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall; and let him that has fallen make haste to get up again, and not despair either of assistance or acceptance therein. III. That it is a practical profitable sermon. Solomon, being brought to repentance, resolves, like his father, to teach transgressors God's way

(Ps. 51:13) and to give warning to all to take heed of slipping upon those rocks which had been fatal to him; and these were fruits meet for repentance. The fundamental error of the children of men, and that which is at the bottom of all their departures from God, is the same with that of our first parents, hoping to be as gods by entertaining themselves with that which seems good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. Now the scope of this book is to show that this is a great mistake, that our happiness consists not in being as gods to ourselves, to have what we will and do what we will, but in having him that made us to be a God to us. The moral philosophers disputed much about man's felicity, or chief good. Various opinions they had about it; but Solomon, in this book, determines the question, and assures us that to fear God and to keep his commandments is the whole of man. He tried what satisfaction might be found in the wealth of the world and the pleasures of sense, and at last pronounced all vanity and vexation; yet multitudes will not take his word, but will make the same dangerous experiment, and it proves fatal to them. He, 1. Shows the vanity of those things in which men commonly look for happiness, as human learning and policy, sensual delight, honour and power, riches and great possessions. And then, 2. He prescribes remedies against the vexation of spirit that attends them. Though we cannot cure them of their vanity, we may prevent the trouble they give us, by sitting loose to them, enjoying them comfortably, but laying our expectations low from them, and acquiescing in the will of God concerning us in every event, especially by remembering God in the days of our youth, and continuing in his fear and service all our days, with an eye to the judgment to come.

## Chapter 1

In this chapter we have, I. The inscription, or title of the book (v. 1). II. The general doctrine of the vanity of the creature laid down (v. 2) and explained (v. 3). III. The proof of this doctrine, taken, 1. From the shortness of human life and the multitude of births and burials in this life (v. 4). 2. From the inconstant nature, and constant revolutions, of all the creatures, and the perpetual flux and reflux they are in, the sun, wind, and water (v. 5-7). 3. From the abundant toil man has about them and the little satisfaction he has in them (v. 8). 4. From the return of the same things again, which shows the end of all perfection, and that the stock is exhausted (v. 9, 10). 5. From the oblivion to which all things are condemned (v. 11). IV. The first instance of the vanity of man's knowledge, and all the parts of learning, especially natural philosophy and politics. Observe, 1. The trial Solomon made of these (v. 12, 13, 16, 17). 2. His judgment of them, that all is vanity (v. 14). For, (1.) There is labour in getting knowledge (v. 13). (2.) There is little good to be done with it (v. 15). (3.) There is no satisfaction in it (v. 18). And, if this is vanity and vexation, all other things in this world, being much inferior to it in dignity and worth, must needs be so too. A great scholar cannot be happy unless he be a true saint.

### Verses 1-3

Here is, I. An account of the penman of this book; it was Solomon, for no other son of David was king of Jerusalem; but he conceals his name *Solomon, peaceable*, because by his sin he had brought trouble upon himself and his kingdom, had broken his peace with God and lost the peace of his conscience, and therefore was no more worthy of that name. Call me not *Solomon*, call me *Marah*, for, *behold, for peace I had great bitterness*. But he calls himself,

1. *The preacher*, which intimates his present character. He is *Koheleth*, which comes from a word which signifies *to gather*; but it is of a feminine termination, by which perhaps Solomon intends to upbraid himself with his effeminacy, which contributed more than any thing to his apostasy; for it was to please his wives that he set up idols, Neh. 13:26. Or the word *soul* must be understood, and so *Koheleth* is,

(1.) A *penitent soul*, or one *gathered*, one that had rambled and gone astray like a lost sheep, but was now reduced, gathered in from his wanderings, gathered home to his duty, and come at length to himself. The spirit that was dissipated after a thousand vanities is now collected and made to centre in God. Divine grace can make great sinners great converts, and renew even those to repentance who, *after they had known the way of righteousness, turned aside from it, and heal their backslidings*, though it is a difficult case. It is only the penitent soul that God will accept, the heart that is broken, not the head that is bowed down like a bulrush only for a day, David's repentance, not Ahab's. And it is only the gathered soul that is the penitent soul, that comes back from its by-paths, that no longer *scatters its way to the strangers* (Jer. 3:13), but is *united to fear God's name*. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak*, and therefore we have here the words of the penitent, and those published. If eminent professors of religion fall into gross sin, they are concerned, for the honour of God and the repairing of the damage they have done to his kingdom, openly to testify their repentance, that the antidote may be administered as extensively as the poison.

(2.) A *preaching soul*, or one *gathering*. Being himself *gathered* to the congregation of saints, out of which he had by his sin thrown himself, and being reconciled to the church, he endeavours to gather others to it that had gone astray like him, and perhaps were led astray by his example. He that has done any thing to seduce his brother ought to do all he can to restore him. Perhaps Solomon called together a congregation of his people, as he had done at the dedication of the temple (1 Ki. 8:2), so now at the rededicating of himself. In that assembly he presided as the people's mouth to God in prayer (v. 12); in this as God's mouth to them in preaching. God by his Spirit made him a preacher, in token of his being reconciled to him; a commission is a tacit pardon. Christ sufficiently testifies his forgiving Peter by committing his lambs and sheep to his trust. Observe, Penitents should be preachers; those that have taken warning themselves to turn and live should give warning to others not to go on and die. *When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren*. Preachers must be preaching *souls*, for that only is likely to reach to the heart that comes from the heart. Paul served God *with his spirit in the gospel of his Son*, Rom. 1:9.

2. *The son of David*. His taking this title intimates, (1.) That he looked upon it as a great honour to be the son of so good a man, and valued himself very much upon it. (2.) That he also looked upon it as a great aggravation of his sin that he had such a father, who had given him a good education and put up many a good prayer for him; it cuts him to the heart to think that he should be a blemish and disgrace to the name and family of such a one as David. It aggravated the sin of Jehoiakim that he was the son of Josiah, Jer. 22:15–17. (3.) That his being the son of David encouraged him to repent and hope for mercy, for David had fallen into sin, by which he should have been warned not to sin, but was not; but David repented, and therein he took example from him and found mercy as he did. Yet this was not all; he was that son of David concerning whom God had said that though he would *chasten his transgression with the rod*, yet he would not *break his covenant* with him, Ps. 89:34. Christ, the great preacher, was the *Son of David*.

3. *King of Jerusalem*. This he mentions, (1.) As that which was a very great aggravation of his sin. He was a king. God had done much for him, in raising him to the throne, and yet he had so ill requited him; his dignity made the bad example and influence of his sin the more dangerous, and many would follow his pernicious ways; especially as he was king of Jerusalem, the holy city, where God's temple was, and of his own building too, where the priests, the Lord's ministers, were, and his prophets who had taught him better things. (2.) As that which might give some advantage to what he wrote, for *where the word of a king is there is power*. He thought it no disparagement to him, as a king, to be a preacher; but the people would regard him the more as a preacher because he was a king. If men of honour would lay out themselves to do good, what a great deal of good might they do! Solomon looked as great in the pulpit, preaching the vanity of the world, as in his throne of ivory, judging.

The Chaldee-paraphrase (which, in this book, makes very large additions to the text, or comments upon it, all along) gives this account of Solomon's writing this book, That by the spirit of prophecy he foresaw the revolt of the ten tribes from his son, and, in process of time, the destruction of Jerusalem and the house of the sanctuary, and the captivity of the people, in the foresight of which he said, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; and to that he applies many passages in this book.

II. The general scope and design of the book. What is it that this royal preacher has to say? That which he aims at is, for the

making of us truly religious, to take down our esteem of and expectation from the things of this world. In order to this, he shows,

1. That they are *all vanity*, v. 2. This is the proposition he lays down and undertakes to prove: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*. It was no new text; his father David had more than once spoken to the same purport. The truth itself here asserted is, that *all is vanity*, all besides God and considered as abstract from him, the *all* of this world, all worldly employments and enjoyments, the *all that is in the world* (1 Jn. 2:16), all that which is agreeable to our senses and to our fancies in this present state, which gains pleasure to ourselves or reputation with others. It is *all vanity*, not only in the abuse of it, when it is perverted by the sin of man, but even in the use of it. Man, considered with reference to these things, is vanity (Ps. 39:5, 6), and, if there were not another life after this, were made in vain (Ps. 89:47); and those things, considered in reference to man (whatever they are in themselves), are *vanity*. They are impertinent to the soul, foreign, and add nothing to it; they do not answer the end, nor yield any true satisfaction; they are uncertain in their continuance, are fading, and perishing, and passing away, and will certainly deceive and disappoint those that put a confidence in them. Let us not therefore *love vanity* (Ps. 4:2), nor *lift up our souls* to it (Ps. 24:4), for we shall but weary ourselves for it, Heb. 2:13. It is expressed here very emphatically; not only, *All is vain*, but in the abstract, *All is vanity*; as if vanity were the *proprium quarto modo*—*property in the fourth mode*, of the things of this world, that which enters into the nature of them. They are not only *vanity*, but *vanity of vanities*, the vainest vanity, vanity in the highest degree, nothing but vanity, such a vanity as is the cause of a great deal of vanity. And this is redoubled, because the thing is certain and past dispute, it is *vanity of vanities*. This intimates that the wise man had his own heart fully convinced of and much affected with this truth, and that he was very desirous that others should be convinced of it and affected with it, as he was, but that he found the generality of men very loth to believe it and consider it (Job 33:14); it intimates likewise that we cannot comprehend and express the vanity of this world. But who is it that speaks thus slightly of the world? Is it one that will stand to what he says? Yes, he puts his name to it—*saith the preacher*. Is it one that was a competent judge? Yes, as much as ever any man was. Many speak contemptuously of the world because they are hermits, and know it not, or beggars, and have it not; but Solomon knew it. He had dived into nature's depths (1 Ki. 4:33), and he had it, more of it perhaps than ever any man had, his head filled with its notions and *his belly* with its *hidden treasures* (Ps. 17:14), and he passes this judgment on it. But did he speak as one having authority? Yes, not only that of a king, but that of a prophet, a preacher; he spoke in God's name, and was divinely inspired to say it. But did he not say it in his haste, or in a passion, upon occasion of some particular disappointment? No; he said it deliberately, said it and proved it, laid it down as a fundamental principle, on which he grounded the necessity of being religious. And, as some think, one main thing he designed was to show that the everlasting throne and kingdom which God had by Nathan promised to David and his seed must be of another world; for all things in this world are subject to vanity, and therefore have not in them sufficient to answer the extent of that promise. If Solomon find all to be vanity, then the kingdom of the Messiah must come, in which we shall inherit substance.

2. That they are insufficient to make us happy. And for this he appeals to men's consciences: *What profit has a man of all the pains he takes?* v. 3. Observe here, (1.) The business of this world described. It is *labour*; the word signifies both care and toil.

It is work that wearies men. There is a constant fatigue in worldly business. It is *labour under the sun*; that is a phrase peculiar to this book, where we meet with it twenty-eight times. There is a world above the sun, a world which needs not the sun, for the glory of God is its light, where there is work without labour and with great profit, the work of angels; but he speaks of the work *under the sun*, the pains of which are great and the gains little. It is *under the sun*, under the influence of the sun, by its light and in its heat; as we have the benefit of the light of the day, so we have sometimes the burden and heat of the day (Mt. 20:12), and therefore *in the sweat of our face we eat bread*. In the dark and cold grave the weary are at rest. (2.) The benefit of that business enquired into: *What profit has a man of all that labour?* Solomon says (Prov. 14:23), *In all labour there is profit*; and yet here he denies that there is any profit. As to our present condition in the world, it is true that by labour we get that which we call *profit*; we *eat the labour of our hands*; but as the wealth of the world is commonly called *substance*, and yet it is *that which is not* (Prov. 22:5), so it is called *profit*, but the question is whether it be really so or no. And here he determines that it is not, that it is not a real benefit, that it is not a remaining benefit. In short, the wealth and pleasure of this world, if we had ever so much of them, are not sufficient to make us happy, nor will they be a portion for us. [1.] As to the body, and the life that now is, *What profit has a man of all his labour? A man's life consists not in an abundance*, Lu. 12:15. As goods are increased care about them is increased, and *those are increased that eat of them*, and a little thing will embitter all the comfort of them; and then *what profit has a man of all his labour?* Early up, and never the nearer. [2.] As to the soul, and the life that is to come, we may much more truly say, *What profit has a man of all his labour?* All he gets by it will not supply the wants of the soul, nor satisfy its desires, will not atone for the sin of the soul, nor cure its diseases, nor contravail the loss of it; what profit will they be of to the soul in death, in judgment, or in the everlasting state? The fruit of our labour in heavenly things is *meat that endures to eternal life*, but the fruit of our labour for the world is only *meat that perishes*.

#### **Verses 4-8**

To prove the vanity of all things under the sun, and their insufficiency to make us happy, Solomon here shows, 1. That the time of our enjoyment of these things is very short, and only while we *accomplish as a hireling his day*. We continue in the world but for one generation, which is continually passing away to make room for another, and we are passing with it. Our worldly possessions we very lately had from others, and must very shortly leave to others, and therefore to us they are vanity; they can be no more substantial than that life which is the *substratum* of them, and that is but a *vapour, which appears for a little while and then vanishes away*. While the stream of mankind is continually flowing, how little enjoyment has one drop of that stream of the pleasant banks between which it glides! We may give God the glory of that constant succession of generations, in which the world has hitherto had its existence, and will have to the end of time, admitting his patience in continuing that sinful species and his power in continuing that dying species. We may be also quickened to do the work of our generation diligently, and serve it faithfully, because it will be over shortly; and, in concern for mankind in general, we should consult the welfare of succeeding generations; but as to our own happiness, let us not expect it within such narrow limits, but in an eternal rest and consistency. 2. That when we leave this world we leave the earth behind us, that *abides for ever* where it is, and therefore the things of the earth can stand us in no stead in the future state. It is well for mankind in general that the earth endures to the end

of time, when it and all the works in it shall be burnt up; but what is that to particular persons, when they remove to the world of spirits? 3. That the condition of man is, in this respect, worse than that even of the inferior creatures: *The earth abides for ever*, but man abides upon the earth but a little while. The sun sets indeed every night, yet it rises again in the morning, as bright and fresh as ever; the winds, though they shift their point, yet in some point or other still they are; the waters that go to the sea above ground come from it again under ground. *But man lies down and rises not*, Job 14:7, 12. 4. That all things in this world are movable and mutable, and subject to a continual toil and agitation, constant in nothing but inconstancy, still going, never resting; it was but once that the sun stood still; when it is risen it is hastening to set, and, when it is set, hastening to rise again (v. 5); the winds are ever and anon shifting (v. 6), and the waters in a continual circulation (v. 7), it would be of as bad consequence for them to stagnate as for the blood in the body to do so. And can we expect rest in a world where all things are thus full of labour (v. 8), on a sea that is always ebbing and flowing, and her waves continually working and rolling? 5. That though all things are still in motion, yet they are still where they were; The sun *parts* (as it is in the margin), but it is to the same place; the wind turns till it comes to the same place, and so the waters return to the place whence they came. Thus man, after all the pains he takes to find satisfaction and happiness in the creature, is but where he was, still as far to seek as ever. Man's mind is as restless in its pursuits as the sun, and wind, and rivers, but never satisfied, never contented; the more it has of the world the more it would have; and it would be no sooner filled with the streams of outward prosperity, the brooks of *honey and butter* (Job 20:17), than the sea is with *all the rivers that run into it*; it is still as it was, *a troubled sea that cannot rest*. 6. That *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*, 2 Pt. 3:4. The earth is where it was; the sun, and winds, and rivers, keep the same course that ever they did; and therefore, if they have never yet been sufficient to make a happiness for man, they are never likely to be so, for they can but yield the same comfort that they have yielded. We must therefore look above the sun for satisfaction, and for a new world. 7. That this world is, at the best, a weary land: *All is vanity*, for all is *full of labour*. The whole creation is made subject to this vanity ever since man was sentenced to *eat bread in the sweat of his brows*. If we survey the whole creation, we shall see all busy; all have enough to do to mind their own business; none will be a portion or happiness for man; all labour to serve him, but none prove a *help-meet* for him. Man cannot express how full of labour all things are, can neither number the laborious nor measure the labours. 8. That our senses are unsatisfied, and the objects of them unsatisfying. He specifies those senses that perform their office with least toil, and are most capable of being pleased: *The eye is not satisfied with seeing*, but is weary of seeing always the same sight, and covets novelty and variety. *The ear* is fond, at first, of a pleasant song or tune, but soon nauseates it, and must have another; both are surfeited, but neither satiated, and what was most grateful becomes ungrateful. Curiosity is still inquisitive, because still unsatisfied, and the more it is humoured the more nice and peevish it grows, crying, *Give, give*.

### **Verses 9-11**

Two things we are apt to take a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction in, and value ourselves upon, with reference to our business and enjoyments in the world, as if they helped to save them from vanity. Solomon shows us our mistake in both.

1. The novelty of the invention, that it is such as was never known before. How grateful is it to think that none ever made such

advances in knowledge, and such discoveries by it, as we, that none ever made such improvements of an estate or trade, and had the art of enjoying the gains of it, as we have. Their contrivances and compositions are all despised and run down, and we boast of new fashions, new hypotheses, new methods, new expressions, which jostle out the old, and put them down. But this is all a mistake: *The thing that is, and shall be, is the same with that which has been, and that which shall be done will be but the same with that which is done, for there is no new thing under the sun, v. 9.* It is repeated (v. 10) by way of question, *is there any thing of which it may be said, with wonder, See, this is new; there never was the like?* It is an appeal to observing men, and a challenge to those that cry up modern learning above that of the ancients. Let them name any thing which they take to be new, and though perhaps we cannot make it to appear, for want of the records of former times, yet we have reason to conclude *that it has been already of old time, which was before us.* What is there in the kingdom of nature of which we may say, *This is new? The works were finished from the foundation of the world* (Heb. 4:3); things which appear new to us, as they do to children, are not so in themselves. The heavens were *of old*; the earth abides for ever; the powers of nature and the links of natural causes are still the same that ever they were. In the kingdom of Providence, though the course and method of it have not such known and certain rules as that of nature, nor does it go always in the same track, yet, in the general, it is still the same thing over and over again. Men's hearts, and the corruptions of them, are still the same; their desires, and pursuits, and complaints, are still the same; and what God does in his dealings with men is according to the scripture, according to the manner, so that it is all repetition. What is surprising to us needs not be so, for there has been the like, the like strange advancements and disappointments, the like strange revolutions and sudden turns, sudden turns of affairs; the miseries of human life have always been much the same, and mankind tread a perpetual round, and, as the sun and wind, are but where they were. Now the design of this is, (1.) To show the folly of the children of men in affecting things that are new, in imagining that they have discovered such things, and in pleasing and priding themselves in them. We are apt to nauseate old things, and to grow weary of what we have been long used to, as Israel of the manna, and covet, with the Athenians, still to tell and hear of some new thing, and admire this and the other as new, whereas it is all what has been. Tatianus the Assyrian, showing the Grecians how all the arts which they valued themselves upon owed their original to those nations which they counted barbarous, thus reasons with them: "For shame, do not call those things *eurepuseis*—*inventions*, which are but *mimepuseis*—*imitations*." (2.) To take us off from expecting happiness or satisfaction in the creature. Why should we look for it there, where never any yet have found it? What reason have we to think that the world should be any kinder to us than it has been to those that have gone before us, since there is nothing in it that is new, and our predecessors have made as much of it as could be made? *Your fathers did eat manna, and yet they are dead.* See Jn. 8:8, 9; 6:49. (3.) To quicken us to secure spiritual and eternal blessings. If we would be entertained with new things, we must acquaint ourselves with the things of God, get a new nature; then *old things pass away, and all things become new*, 2 Co. 5:17. The gospel puts *a new song into our mouths*. In heaven *all is new* (Rev. 21:5), all new at first, wholly unlike the present state of things, a new world indeed (Lu. 20:35), and all new to eternity, always fresh, always flourishing. This consideration should make us willing to die, That in this world there is nothing but the same over and over again, and we can expect nothing from it more or better than we have had.

2. The memorableness of the achievement, that it is such as will be known and talked of hereafter. Many think they have found satisfaction enough in this, that their names shall be perpetuated, that posterity will celebrate the actions they have performed, the honours they have won, and the estates they have raised, that *their houses shall continue for ever* (Ps. 49:11); but herein they deceive themselves. How many *former things* and persons were there, which in their day looked very great and made a mighty figure, and yet *there is no remembrance* of them; they are buried in oblivion. Here and there one person or action that was remarkable met with a kind historian, and had the good hap to be recorded, when at the same time there were others, no less remarkable, that were dropped: and therefore we may conclude that *neither shall there be any remembrance of things to come*, but that which we hope to be remembered by will be either lost or slighted.

### **Verses 12-18**

Solomon, having asserted in general that *all is vanity*, and having given some general proofs of it, now takes the most effectual method to evince the truth of it, 1. By his own experience; he tried them all, and found them vanity. 2. By an induction of particulars; and here he begins with that which bids fairest of all to be the happiness of a reasonable creature, and that is knowledge and learning; if this be vanity, every thing else must needs be so. Now as to this,

I. Solomon tells us here what trial he had made of it, and that with such advantages that, if true satisfaction could have been found in it, he would have found it. 1. His high station gave him an opportunity of improving himself in all parts of learning, and particularly in politics and the conduct of human affairs, v. 12. He that is *the preacher* of this doctrine *was king over Israel*, whom all their neighbours admired as *a wise and understanding people*, Deu. 4:6. He had his royal seat *in Jerusalem*, which then deserved, better than Athens ever did, to be called *the eye of the world*. The heart of a king is unsearchable; he has reaches of his own, and *a divine sentence is often in his lips*. It is his honour, it is his business, to search out every matter. Solomon's great wealth and honour put him into a capacity of making his court the centre of learning and the rendezvous of learned men, of furnishing himself with the best of books, and either conversing or corresponding with all the wise and knowing part of mankind then in being, who made application to him to learn of him, by which he could not but improve himself; for it is in knowledge as it is in trade, all the profit is by barter and exchange; if we have that to say which will instruct others, they will have that to say which will instruct us. Some observe how slightly Solomon speaks of his dignity and honour. He does not say, *I the preacher am king*, but *I was king*, no matter what I am. He speaks of it as a thing past, because worldly honours are transitory. 2. He applied himself to the improvement of these advantages, and the opportunities he had of getting wisdom, which, though ever so great, will not make a man wise unless he give his mind to it. Solomon *gave his heart to seek and search out* all things to be known *by wisdom*, v. 13. He made it his business to acquaint himself with *all the things that are done under the sun*, that are done by the providence of God or by the art and prudence of man. He set himself to get all the insight he could into philosophy and mathematics, into husbandry and trade, merchandise and mechanics, into the history of former ages and the present state of other kingdoms, their laws, customs, and policies, into men's different tempers, capacities, and projects, and the methods of managing them; he set himself not only to seek, but to search, to pry into, that which is most intricate, and which requires the closes application of mind and the most vigorous and constant prosecution. Though he was a

prince, he made himself a drudge to learning, was not discouraged by its knots, nor took up short of its depths. And this he did, not merely to gratify his own genius, but to qualify himself for the service of God, and his generation, and to make an experiment how far the enlargement of the knowledge would go towards the settlement and repose of the mind. 3. He made a very great progress in his studies, wonderfully improved all the parts of learning, and carried his discoveries much further than any that had been before him. He did not condemn learning, as many do, because they cannot conquer it and will not be at the pains to make themselves masters of it; no, what he aimed at he compassed; he *saw all the works that were done under the sun* (v. 14), works of nature in the upper and lower world, all within this vortex (to use the modern gibberish) which has the sun for its centre, works of art, the product of men's wit, in a personal or social capacity. he had as much satisfaction in the success of his searches as ever any man had; he *communed with his own heart* concerning his attainments in knowledge, with as much pleasure as ever any rich merchant had in taking account of his stock. He could say, "*Lo, I have magnified and increased wisdom, have not only gotten more of it myself, but have done more to propagate it and bring it into reputation, than any, than all that have been before me in Jerusalem.*" Note, It becomes great men to be studious, and delight themselves most in intellectual pleasures. Where God gives great advantages of getting knowledge he expects improvements accordingly. It is happy with a people when their princes and noblemen study to excel others as much in wisdom and useful knowledge as they do in honour and estate; and they may do that service to the commonwealth of learning by applying themselves to the studies that are proper for them which meaner persons cannot do. Solomon must be acknowledged as competent judge of this matter, for he had not only got his head full of notions, but his *heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge*, of the power and benefit of knowledge, as well as the amusement and entertainment of it; what he knew he had digested, and knew how to make use of. *Wisdom entered into his heart*, and so became *pleasant to his soul*, Prov. 2:10, 11; 22:18. 4. He applied his studies especially to that part of learning which is most serviceable to the conduct of human life, and consequently is the most valuable (v. 17): "*I gave my heart to know the rules and dictates of wisdom, and how I might obtain it; and to know madness and folly, how I might prevent and cure it, to know the snares and insinuations of it, that I might avoid them, and guard against them, and discover its fallacies.*" So industrious was Solomon to improve himself in knowledge that he gained instruction both by the wisdom of prudent men and by the madness of foolish men, by *the field of the slothful*, as well as of *the diligent*.

II. He tells us what was the result of this trial, to confirm what he had said, that *all is vanity*.

1. He found that his searches after knowledge were very toilsome, and a weariness not only to the flesh, but to the mind (v. 13): *This sore travail*, this difficulty that there is in searching after truth and finding it, *God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted therewith*, as a punishment for our first parents' coveting forbidden knowledge. As bread for the body, so that for the soul, must be got and eaten *in the sweat of our face*, whereas both would have been had without labour if Adam had not sinned.

2. He found that the more he saw of *the works done under the sun* the more he saw of their vanity; nay, and the sight often occasioned him *vexation of spirit* (v. 14): "*I have seen all the works of a world full of business, have observed what the children of men are doing; and behold, whatever men think of their own works, I see all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*" He

had before pronounced all *vanity* (v. 2), needless and unprofitable, and that which does us no good; here he adds, It is all *vexation of spirit*, troublesome and prejudicial, and that which does us hurt. It is *feeding upon wind*; so some read it, Hos. 12:1. (1.) The works themselves which we see done are *vanity and vexation* to those that are employed in them. There is so much care in the contrivance of our worldly business, so much toil in the prosecution of it, and so much trouble in the disappointments we meet with in it, that we may well say, It is *vexation of spirit*. (2.) The sight of them is *vanity and vexation of spirit* to the wise observer of them. The more we see of the world the more we see to make us uneasy, and, with Heraclitus, to look upon all with weeping eyes. Solomon especially perceived that the knowledge of *wisdom and folly* was *vexation of spirit*, v. 17. It vexed him to see many that had wisdom not use it, and many that had folly not strive against it. It vexed him when he knew wisdom to see how far off it stood from the children of men, and, when he saw folly, to see how fast it was bound in their hearts.

3. He found that when he had got some knowledge he could neither gain that satisfaction to himself nor do that good to others with it which he expected, v. 15. It would not avail, (1.) To redress the many grievances of human life: "After all, I find that *that which is crooked* will be crooked still and *cannot be made straight*." Our knowledge is itself intricate and perplexed; we must go far about and fetch a great compass to come at it. Solomon thought to find out a nearer way to it, but he could not. The paths of learning are as much a labyrinth as ever they were. The minds and manners of men are crooked and perverse. Solomon thought, with his wisdom and power together, thoroughly to reform his kingdom, and make that straight which he found crooked; but he was disappointed. All the philosophy and politics in the world will not restore the corrupt nature of man to its primitive rectitude; we find the insufficiency of them both in others and in ourselves. Learning will not alter men's natural tempers, nor cure them of their sinful distempers; nor will it change the constitution of things in this world; a vale of tears it is and so it will be when all is done. (2.) To make up the many deficiencies in the comfort of human life: *That which is wanting* there *cannot be numbered*, or counted out to us from the treasures of human learning, but what *is wanting* will still be so. All our enjoyments here, when we have done our utmost to bring them to perfection, are still lame and defective, and it cannot be helped; as they are, so they are likely to be. *That which is wanting* in our knowledge is so much that it *cannot be numbered*. The more we know the more we see of our own ignorance. *Who can understand his errors*, his defects?

4. Upon the whole, therefore, he concluded that great scholars do but make themselves great mourners; *for in much wisdom is much grief*, v. 18. There must be a great deal of pains taken to get it, and a great deal of care not to forget it; the more we know the more we see there is to be known, and consequently we perceive with greater clearness that our work is without end, and the more we see of our former mistakes and blunders, which occasions *much grief*. The more we see of men's different sentiments and opinions (and it is that which a great deal of our learning is conversant about) the more at a loss we are, it may be, which is in the right. Those *that increase knowledge* have so much the more quick and sensible perception of the calamities of this world, and for one discovery they make that is pleasing, perhaps, they make ten that are displeasing, and so they *increase sorrow*. Let us not therefore be driven off from the pursuit of any useful knowledge, but put on patience to break through the sorrow of it; but let us despair of finding true happiness in this knowledge, and expect it only in the knowledge of

God and the careful discharge of our duty to him. *He that increases* in heavenly wisdom, and in an experimental acquaintance with the principles, powers, and pleasures of the spiritual and divine life, *increases* joy, such as will shortly be consummated in everlasting joy.

## Chapter 2

Solomon having pronounced all vanity, and particularly knowledge and learning, which he was so far from giving himself joy of that he found the increase of it did but increase his sorrow, in this chapter he goes on to show what reason he has to be tired of this world, and with what little reason most men are fond of it. I. He shows that there is no true happiness and satisfaction to be had in mirth and pleasure, and the delights of sense (v. 1–11). II. He reconsiders the pretensions of wisdom, and allows it to be excellent and useful, and yet sees it clogged with such diminutions of its worth that it proves insufficient to make a man happy (v. 12–16). III. He enquires how far the business and wealth of this world will go towards making men happy, and concludes, from his own experience, that, to those who set their hearts upon it, "it is vanity and vexation of spirit," (v. 17–23), and that, if there be any good in it, it is only to those that sit loose to it (v. 24–26).

### Verses 1-11

Solomon here, in pursuit of the *summum bonum*—*the felicity* of man, adjourns out of his study, his library, his elaboratory, his council-chamber, where he had in vain sought for it, into the park and the playhouse, his garden and his summer-house; he exchanges the company of the philosophers and grave senators for that of the wits and gallants, and the beaux-esprits, of his court, to try if he could find true satisfaction and happiness among them. Here he takes a great step downward, from the noble pleasures of the intellect to the brutal ones of sense; yet, if he resolve to make a thorough trial, he must knock at this door, because here a great part of mankind imagine they have found that which he was in quest of.

I. He resolved to try what mirth would do and the pleasures of wit, whether he should be happy if he constantly entertained himself and others with merry stories and jests, banter and drollery; if he should furnish himself with all the pretty ingenious turns and repartees he could invent or pick up, fit to be laughed over, and all the bulls, and blunders, and foolish things, he could hear of, fit to be ridiculed and laughed at, so that he might be always in a merry humour. 1. This experiment made (v. 1): "Finding that *in much wisdom is much grief*, and that those who are serious are apt to be melancholy, *I said in my heart*" (to my heart), "*Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth*; I will try if that will give thee satisfaction." Neither the temper of his mind nor his outward condition had any thing in them to keep him from being merry, but both agreed, as did all other advantages, to further it; *therefore* he resolved to take a lease this way, and said, "*Enjoy pleasure*, and take thy fill of it; cast away care, and resolve to be merry." So a man may be, and yet have none of these fine things which he here got to entertain himself with; many that are poor are very merry; beggars in a barn are so to a proverb. Mirth is the entertainment of the fancy, and, though it comes short of the solid delights of the rational powers, yet it is to be preferred before those that are merely carnal and sensual. Some distinguish man from the brutes, not only as *animal rationale*—*a rational animal*, but as *animal risibile*—*a laughing animal*; therefore he that said to his soul, *Take thy ease, eat and drink*, added, *And be merry*, for it was in order to that that he would eat and drink. "Try therefore," says Solomon, "to laugh and be fat, to laugh and be happy." 2. The judgment he passed upon this experiment: *Behold, this also is vanity*, like all the rest; it yields no true satisfaction, v. 2. *I said of laughter, It is mad*, or, *Thou art mad*, and therefore I will have nothing to do with thee; *and of mirth* (of all sports and recreations, and whatever

pretends to be diverting), *What doeth it?* or, *What doest thou?* Innocent mirth, soberly, seasonable, and moderately used, is a good thing, fits for business, and helps to soften the toils and chagrins of human life; but, when it is excessive and immoderate, it is foolish and fruitless. (1.) It does no good: *What doeth it? Cui bono—of what use is it?* It will not avail to quiet a guilty conscience; no, nor to ease a sorrowful spirit; nothing is more ungrateful than *singing songs to a heavy heart*. It will not satisfy the soul, nor ever yield it true content. It is but a palliative cure to the grievances of this present time. Great laughter commonly ends in a sigh. (2.) It does a great deal of hurt: *It is mad*, that is, it makes men mad, it transports men into many indecencies, which are a reproach to their reason and religion. They are mad that indulge themselves in it, for it estranges the heart from God and divine things, and insensibly eats out the power of religion. Those that love to be merry forget to be serious, and, while they take the timbrel and harp, they *say to the Almighty, Depart from us*, Job 21:12, 14. We may, as Solomon, *prove ourselves, with mirth*, and judge of the state of our souls by this: How do we stand affected to it? Can we be merry and wise? Can we use it as sauce, and not as food? But we need not try, as Solomon did, whether it will make a happiness for us, for we may take his word for it, *It is mad*; and *What does it?* Laughter and pleasure (says Sir William Temple) come from very different affections of the mind; for, as men have no disposition to laugh at things they are most pleased with, so they are very little pleased with many things they laugh at.

II. Finding himself not happy in that which pleased his fancy, he resolved next to try that which would please the palate, v. 3. Since the knowledge of the creature would not satisfy, he would see what the liberal use of it would do: *I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine*, that is, to good meat and good drink. Many give themselves to these without consulting their hearts at all, not looking any further than merely the gratification of the sensual appetite; but Solomon applied himself to it rationally, and as a man, critically, and only to make an experiment. Observe, 1. He did not allow himself any liberty in the use of the delights of sense till he had tired himself with his severe studies. Till his *increase of sorrow*, he never thought of giving himself *to wine*. When we have spent ourselves in doing good we may then most comfortably refresh ourselves with the gifts of God's bounty. *Then* the delights of sense are rightly used when they are used as we use cordials, only when we need them; as Timothy drank wine for his health's sake, 1 Tim. 5:23. *I thought to draw my flesh with wine* (so the margin reads it) or *to wine*. Those that have addicted themselves to drinking did at first put a force upon themselves; they drew their flesh to it, and with it; but they should remember to what miseries they hereby draw themselves. 2. He then looked upon it as folly, and it was with reluctance that he gave himself to it; as St. Paul, when he commended himself, called it a *weakness*, and desired to be borne with in his *foolishness*, 2 Co. 11:1. He sought *to lay hold on folly*, to see the utmost that that folly would do towards making men happy; but he had like to have carried the jest (as we say) too far. He resolved that the folly should not take hold of him, not get the mastery of him, but he would lay hold on it, and keep it at a distance; yet he found it too hard for him. 3. He took care at the same time to *acquaint himself with wisdom*, to manage himself wisely in the use of his pleasures, so that they should not do him any prejudice nor disfit him to be a competent judge of them. When he *drew his flesh with wine* he *led his heart with wisdom* (so the word is), kept up his pursuits after knowledge, did not make a sot of himself, nor become a slave to his pleasures, but his studies and his feasts were foils to each other, and he tried whether both mixed together would give him

that satisfaction which he could not find in either separately. This Solomon proposed to himself, but he found it *vanity*; for those that think to give themselves to wine, and yet to acquaint their hearts with wisdom, will perhaps deceive themselves as much as those do that think to serve both God and mammon. *Wine is a mocker*; it is a great cheat; and it will be impossible for any man to say that thus far he will give himself to it and no further. 4. That which he aimed at was not to gratify his appetite, but to find out man's happiness, and this, because it pretended to be so, must be tried among the rest. Observe the description he gives of man's happiness—it is *that good for the sons of men which they should do under the heaven all their days*. (1.) That which we are to enquire after is not so much the good we must have (we may leave that to God), but the good we must do; that ought to be our care. *Good Master, what good thing shall I do?* Our happiness consists not in being idle, but in doing aright, in being well employed. If we *do that which is good*, no doubt we shall have comfort and *praise of the same*. (2.) It is good to be done *under the heaven*, while we are here in this world, while it is day, while our doing time lasts. This is our state of work and service; it is in the other world that we must expect the retribution. Thither our works will follow us. (3.) It is to be done *all the days of our life*. The good we are to do we must persevere in the doing of to the end, while our doing time lasts, *the number of the days of our life* (so it is in the margin); the days of our life are numbered to us by him in whose hand our times are and they are all to be spent as he directs. But that any man should give himself to wine, in hopes to find out in that the best way of living in this world, was an absurdity which Solomon here, in the reflection, condemns himself for. Is it possible that this should be the good that men should do? No; it is plainly very bad.

III. Perceiving quickly that it was folly to give himself to wine, he next tried the most costly entertainments and amusements of princes and great men. He had a vast income; the revenue of his crown was very great, and he laid it out so as might most please his own humour and make him look great.

1. He gave himself much to building, both in the city and in the country; and, having been at such vast expense in the beginning of his reign to build a house for God, he was the more excusable if afterwards he pleased his own fancy in building for himself; he began his work at the right end (Mt. 6:33), not as the people (Hag. 1:4), that *ceiled their own houses* while God's *lay waste*, and it prospered accordingly. In building, he had the pleasure of employing the poor and doing good to posterity. We read of Solomon's buildings (1 Ki. 9:15–19), and they were all *great works*, such as became his purse, and spirit, and great dignity. See his mistake; he enquired after the *good* works he should do (v. 3), and, in pursuit of the enquiry, applied himself to *great* works. *Good* works indeed are truly great, but many are reputed great works which are far from being good, wondrous works which are not gracious, Mt. 7:22.

2. He took to love a garden, which is to some as bewitching as building. He *planted himself vineyards*, which the soil and climate of the land of Canaan favoured; he *made himself fine gardens and orchards* (v. 5), and perhaps the art of gardening was no way inferior then to what it is now. He had not only forests of timber-trees, but *trees of all kinds of fruit*, which he himself had planted; and, if any worldly business would yield a man happiness, surely it must be that which Adam was employed in while he was in innocency.

3. He laid out a great deal of money in water-works, ponds, and canals, not for sport and diversion, but for use, *to water the*

wood that brings forth trees (v. 6); he not only planted, but watered, and then left it to God to give the increase. *Springs of water* are great *blessings* (Jos. 15:19); but where nature has provided them art must direct them, to make them serviceable, Prov. 21:1.

4. He increased his family. When he proposed to himself to do *great works* he must employ many hands, and therefore procured *servants and maidens*, which were bought with his money, and of those he *had servants born in his house*, v. 7. Thus his retinue was enlarged and his court appeared more magnificent. See Ezra 2:58.

5. He did not neglect country business, but both entertained and enriched himself with that, and was not diverted from it either by his studies or by his pleasures. He *had large possessions of great and small cattle*, herds and flocks, as his father had before him (1 Chr. 27:29, 31), not forgetting that his father, in the beginning, was a keeper of sheep. Let those that deal in cattle neither despise their employment nor be weary of it, remembering that Solomon puts his having *possessions of cattle* among his *great works* and his pleasures.

6. He grew very rich, and was not at all impoverished by his building and gardening, as many are, who, for that reason only, repent it, and call it *vanity and vexation*. Solomon scattered and yet increased. He filled his exchequer with *silver and gold*, which yet did not stagnate there, but were made to circulate through his kingdom, so that he made *silver to be in Jerusalem as stones* (1 Ki. 10:27); nay, he had the *segullah, the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces*, which was, for richness and rarity, more accounted of than *silver and gold*. The neighbouring kings, and the distant provinces of his own empire, sent him the richest presents they had, to obtain his favour and the instructions of his wisdom.

7. He had every thing that was charming and diverting, all sorts of melody and music, vocal and instrumental, *men-singers and women-singers*, the best voices he could pick up, and all the wind and band-instruments that were then in use. His father had a genius for music, but it should seem he employed it more to serve his devotion than the son, who made it more for his diversion. These are called *the delights of the sons of men*; for the gratifications of sense are the things that the generality of people set their affections upon and take the greatest complacency in. The delights of the children of God are of quite another nature, pure, spiritual, and heavenly, and the delights of angels.

8. He enjoyed, more than ever any man did, a composition of rational and sensitive pleasures at the same time. He was, in this respect, *great, and increased more than all that were before him*, that he was wise amidst a thousand earthly enjoyments. It was strange, and the like was never met with, (1.) That his pleasures did not debauch his judgment and conscience. In the midst of these entertainments *his wisdom remained with him*, v. 9. In the midst of all these childish delights he preserved his spirit manly, kept the possession of his own soul, and maintained the dominion of reason over the appetites of sense; such a vast stock of wisdom had he that it was not wasted and impaired, as any other man's would have been, by this course of life. But let none be emboldened hereby to lay the reins on the neck of their appetites, presuming that they may do that and yet retain their wisdom, for they have not such a strength of wisdom as Solomon had; nay, and Solomon was deceived; for how did *his wisdom remain with him* when he lost his religion so far as to build altars to strange gods, for the humouring of his strange wives? But thus far *his wisdom remained with him* that he was master of his pleasures, and not a slave to them, and kept

himself capable of making a judgment of them. He went over into the enemies' country, not as a deserter, but as a *spy*, to discover the nakedness of their land. (2.) Yet his judgment and conscience gave no check to his pleasures, nor hindered him from exacting the very quintessence of the delights of sense, v. 10. It might be objected against his judgment in this matter that if *his wisdom remained with him* he could not take the liberty that was necessary to a full experimental acquaintance with it: "Yea," said he, "I took as great a liberty as any man could take, for *whatsoever my eyes desired I kept not from them*, if it could be compassed by lawful means, though ever so difficult or costly; and as *I withheld not any joy from my heart* that I had a mind to, so *I withheld not my heart from any joy*, but, with a *non-obstante*—with the full exercise of my wisdom, I had a high gust of my pleasures, relished and enjoyed them as much as ever any Epicure did;" nor was there any thing either in the circumstances of his condition or in the temper of his spirit to sour or embitter them, or give them any alloy. In short, [1.] He had as much pleasure in his business as ever any man had: *My heart rejoiced in all my labour*; so that the toil and fatigue of that were no damp to his pleasures. [2.] He had no less profit by his business. He met with no disappointment in it to give him any disturbance: *This was my portion of all my labour*; he had this added to all the rest of his pleasures that in them he did not only see, but eat, the labour of his hands; and this was all he had, for indeed it was all he could expect, from his labours. It sweetened his business that he enjoyed the success of it, and it sweetened his enjoyments that they were the product of his business; so that, upon the whole, he was certainly as happy as the world could make him.

9. We have, at length, the judgment he deliberately gave of all this, v. 11. When the Creator had made his great works he reviewed them, and *behold, all was very good*; every thing pleased him. But when Solomon reviewed *all his works that his hands had wrought* with the utmost cost and care, *and the labour that he had laboured to do* in order to make himself easy and happy, nothing answered his expectation; *behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit*; he had no satisfaction in it, no advantage by it; *there was no profit under the sun*, neither by the employments nor by the enjoyments of this world.

### **Verses 12-16**

Solomon having tried what satisfaction was to be had in learning first, and then in the pleasures of sense, and having also put both together, here compares them one with another and passes a judgment upon them.

I. He sets himself to consider both wisdom and folly. He had considered these before (ch. 1:17); but lest it should be thought he was then too quick in passing a judgment upon them, he here turns himself again to behold them, to see if, upon a second view and second thoughts, he could gain more satisfaction in the search than he had done upon the first. He was sick of his pleasures, and, as nauseating them, he turned from them, that he might again apply himself to speculation; and if, upon this rehearing of the cause, the verdict be still the same, the judgment will surely be decisive; *for what can the man do that comes after the king?* especially such a king, who had so much of this world to make the experiment upon and so much wisdom to make it with. The baffled trial needs not be repeated. No man can expect to find more satisfaction in the world than Solomon did, nor to gain a greater insight into the principles of morality; when a man has done what he can still it is *that which has been already done*. Let us learn, 1. Not to indulge ourselves in a fond conceit that we can mend that which has been well done before us. Let us *esteem others better than ourselves*, and think how unfit we are to attempt the improvement of the

performances of better heads and hands than ours, and rather own how much we are beholden to them, Jn. 4:37, 38. 2. To acquiesce in Solomon's judgment of the things of this world, and not to think of repeating the trial; for we can never think of having such advantages as he had to make the experiment nor of being able to make it with equal application of mind and so little danger to ourselves.

II. He gives the preference to wisdom far before folly. Let none mistake him, as if, when he speaks of the vanity of human literature, he designed only to amuse men with a paradox, or were about to write (as a great wit once did) *Encomium moriae—A panegyric in praise of folly*. No, he is maintaining sacred truths, and therefore is careful to guard against being misunderstood. I soon *saw* (says he) *that there is an excellency in wisdom more than in folly*, as much as there is in light above darkness. The pleasures of wisdom, though they suffice not to make men happy, yet vastly transcend the pleasures of wine. Wisdom enlightens the soul with surprising discoveries and necessary directions for the right government of itself; but sensuality (for that seems to be especially the folly here meant) clouds and eclipses the mind, and is as darkness to it; it puts out men's eyes, makes them to stumble in the way and wander out of it. Or, though wisdom and knowledge will not make a man happy (St Paul shows a *more excellent way* than gifts, and that is grace), yet it is much better to have them than to be without them, in respect of our present safety, comfort, and usefulness; for *the wise man's eyes are in his head* (v. 14), where they should be, ready to discover both the dangers that are to be avoided and the advantages that are to be improved; a wise man has not his reason to seek when he should use it, but looks about him and is quick-sighted, knows both where to step and where to stop; whereas *the fool walks in darkness*, and is ever and anon either at a loss, or at a plunge, either bewildered, that he knows not which way to go, or embarrassed, that he cannot go forward. A man that is discreet and considerate has the command of his business, and acts decently and safely, as those that walk in the day; but he that is rash, and ignorant, and sottish, is continually making blunders, running upon one precipice or other; his projects, his bargains, are all foolish, and ruin his affairs. Therefore *get wisdom, get understanding*.

III. Yet he maintains that, in respect of lasting happiness and satisfaction, the wisdom of this world gives a man very little advantage; for, 1. Wise men and fools fare alike. "It is true the wise man has very much the advantage of the fool in respect of foresight and insight, and yet the greatest probabilities do so often come short of success that *I myself perceived*, by my own experience, that *one event happens to them all* (v. 14); those that are most cautious of their health are as soon sick as those that are most careless of it, and the most suspicious are imposed upon." David had observed that *wise men die*, and are involved in the same common calamity with the fool and the brutish person, Ps. 49:12. See ch. 9:11. Nay, it has of old been observed that *Fortune favours fools*, and that half-witted men often thrive most, while the greatest projectors forecast worst for themselves. The same sickness, the same sword, devours wise men and fools. Solomon applies this mortifying observation to himself (v. 15), that though he was a wise man, he might not *glory in his wisdom; I said to my heart*, when it began to be proud or secure, *As it happens to the fool, so it happens to me, even to me*; for thus emphatically it is expressed in the original: "So, *as for me*, it happens to me. Am I rich? So is many a Nabal that fares as sumptuously as I do. Is a foolish man sick, does he get a fall? So do I, *even I*; and neither my wealth nor my wisdom will be my security. *And why was I then more wise?* Why should I take so

much pains to get wisdom, when, as to this life, it will stand me in so little stead? *Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity.*" Some make this a correction of what was said before, like that (Ps. 77:10), "*I said, This is my infirmity; it is my folly to think that wise men and fools are upon a level;*" but really they seem to be so, in respect of the event, and therefore it is rather a confirmation of what he had before said, That a man may be a profound philosopher and politician and yet not be a happy man. 2. Wise men and fools are forgotten alike (v. 16): *There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool.* It is promised to the righteous that they *shall be had in everlasting remembrance, and their memory shall be blessed, and they shall shortly shine as the stars;* but there is no such promise made concerning the wisdom of this world, that that shall perpetuate men's names, for those names only are perpetuated that are *written in heaven*, and otherwise the names of this world's wise men are written with those of its fools in the dust. *That which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten.* What was much talked of in one generation is, in the next, as if it had never been. New persons and new things jostle out the very remembrance of the old, which in a little time are looked upon with contempt and at length quite buried in oblivion. *Where is the wise? Where is the disputer of this world?* 1 Co. 1:20. And it is upon this account that he asks, *How dies the wise man? As the fool.* Between the death of a godly and a wicked man there is a great difference, but not between the death of a wise man and a fool; the fool is buried and forgotten (ch. 8:10), *and no one remembered the poor man that by his wisdom delivered the city* (ch. 9:15); so that to both the grave is a *land of forgetfulness*; and wise and learned men, when they have been awhile there out of sight, grow out of mind, a new generation arises that *knew them not.*

### **Verses 17-26**

Business is a thing that wise men have pleasure in. They are in their element when they are in their business, and complain if they be out of business. They may sometimes be tired with their business, but they are not weary of it, nor willing to leave it off. Here therefore one would expect to have found the good that men should do, but Solomon tried this too; after a contemplative life and a voluptuous life, he betook himself to an active life, and found no more satisfaction in it than in the other; still it is all *vanity and vexation of spirit*, of which he gives an account in these verses, where observe, I. What the business was which he made trial of; it was business *under the sun* (v. 17–20), about the things of this world, sublunary things, the riches, honours, and pleasures of this present time; it was the business of a king. There is business *above the sun*, perpetual business, which is perpetual blessedness; what we do in conformity to that business (doing *God's will as it is done in heaven*) and in pursuance of that blessedness, will turn to a good account; we shall have no reason to hate that labour, nor to despair of it. But it is *labour under the sun*, labour for the *meat that perishes* (Jn. 6:27; Isa. 55:2), that Solomon here speaks of with so little satisfaction. It was the better sort of business, not that of the *hewers of wood and drawers of water* (it is not so strange if men hate all that labour), but it was *in wisdom, and knowledge, and equity*, v. 21. It was rational business, which related to the government of his kingdom and the advancement of its interests. It was labour managed by the dictates of wisdom, of natural and acquired knowledge, and the directions of justice. It was labour at the council-board and in the courts of justice. It was labour wherein he *showed himself wise* (v. 19), which as much excels the labour wherein men only show themselves strong as the endowments of the mind, by which we are allied to angels, do those of the body, which we have in

common with the brutes. That which many people have in their eye more than any thing else, in the prosecution of their worldly business, is to *show themselves wise*, to get the reputation of ingenious men and men of sense and application.

II. His falling out with this business. He soon grew weary of it. 1. He *hated all his labour*, because he did not meet with that satisfaction in which he expected. After he had had his fine houses, and gardens, and water-works, awhile, he began to nauseate them, and look upon them with contempt, as children, who are eager for a toy and fond of it at first, but, when they have played with it awhile, are weary of it, and throw it away, and must have another. This expresses not a gracious hatred of these things, which is our duty, to love them less than God and religion (Lu. 14:26), nor a sinful hatred of them, which is our folly, to be weary of the place God has assigned us and the work of it, but a natural hatred of them, arising from a surfeit upon them and a sense of disappointment in them. 2. He *caused his heart to despair of all his labour* (v. 20); he took pains to possess himself with a deep sense of the vanity of worldly business, that it would not bring in the advantage and satisfaction he had formerly flattered himself with the hopes of. Our hearts are very loth to quit their expectations of great things from the creature; we must go about, must fetch a compass, in arguing with them, to convince them that there is not that in the things of this world which we are apt to promise ourselves from them. Have we so often bored and sunk into this earth for some rich mine of satisfaction, and found not the least sign or token of it, but been always frustrated in the search, and shall we not at length set our hearts at rest and despair of ever finding it? 3. He came to that, at length, that he *hated life itself* (v. 17), because it is subject to so many toils and troubles, and a constant series of disappointments. God had given Solomon such largeness of heart, and such vast capacities of mind, that he experienced more than other men of the unsatisfying nature of all the things of this life and their insufficiency to make him happy. Life itself, that is so precious to a man, and such a blessing to a good man, may become a burden to a man of business.

III. The reasons of this quarrel with his life and labours. Two things made him weary of them:—

1. That his business was so great a toil to himself: *The work that he had wrought under the sun was grievous unto him*, v. 17. His thoughts and cares about it, and that close and constant application of mind which was requisite to it, were a burden and fatigue to him, especially when he grew old. It is the effect of a curse on that we are to work upon. Our business is said to be *the work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed* (Gen. 5:29) and of the weakening of the faculties we are to work with, and of the sentence pronounced on us, that in *the sweat of our face we must eat bread*. Our labour is called *the vexation of our heart* (v. 22); it is to most a force upon themselves, so natural is it to us to love our ease. A man of business is described to be uneasy both in his *going out* and his *coming in*, v. 23. (1.) He is deprived of his pleasure by day, for *all his days are sorrow*, not only sorrowful, but sorrow itself, nay, many sorrows and various; his travail, or labour, all day, is grief. Men of business ever and anon meet with that which vexes them, and is an occasion of anger or sorrow to them. Those that are apt to fret find that the more dealings they have in the world the oftener they are made to fret. The world is a *vale of tears*, even to those that have much of it. Those that *labour* are said to be *heavy-laden*, and are therefore called to come to Christ for rest, Mt. 11:28. (2.) He is disturbed in his repose *by night*. When he is overcome with the hurries of the day, and hopes to find relief when he lays his head on his pillow, he is disappointed there; *cares hold his eyes waking*, or, if he sleep, yet

his heart wakes, and that *takes no rest in the night*. See what fools those are that make themselves drudges to the world, and do not make God their rest; night and day they cannot but be uneasy. So that, upon the whole matter, it is *all vanity*, v. 17. *This is vanity* in particular (v. 19, 23), nay, it is *vanity and a great evil*, v. 21. It is a great affront to God and a great injury to themselves, therefore a *great evil*; it is a vain thing *to rise up early and sit up late* in pursuit of this world's goods, which were never designed to be our chief good.

2. That the gains of his business must all be left to others. Prospect of advantage is the spring of action and the spur of industry; *therefore* men labour, because they hope to get by it; if the hope fail, the labour flags; and *therefore* Solomon quarrelled with all the works, the great works, he had made, because they would not be of any lasting advantage to himself.

(1.) He must leave them. He could not at death take them away with him, nor any share of them, nor should he return any more to them (Job 7:10), nor would the remembrance of them do him any good, Lu. 16:25. But I must *leave all to the man that shall be after me*, to the generation that comes up in the room of that which is passing away. As there were many before us, who built the houses that we live in, and into whose purchases and labours we have entered, so there shall be many after us, who shall live in the houses that we build, and enjoy the fruit of our purchases and labours. Never was land lost for want of an heir. To a gracious soul this is no uneasiness at all; why should we grudge others their turn in the enjoyments of this world, and not rather be pleased that, when we are gone, those that come after us shall fare the better for our wisdom and industry? But to a worldly mind, that seeks for its own happiness in the creature, it is a great vexation to think of leaving the beloved self behind, at this uncertainty. (2.) He must leave them to those that would never have taken so much pains for them, and will thereby excuse himself from taking any pains. He that raised the estate did it by *labouring in wisdom, and knowledge, and equity*; but he that enjoys it and spends it (it may be) *has not laboured therein* (v. 21), and, more than that, never will. The bee toils to maintain the drone. Nay, it proves a snare to him: it is left him *for his portion*, which he rests in, and takes up with; and miserable he is in being put off with it for a portion. Whereas, if an estate had not come to him thus easily, who knows but he might have been both industrious and religious? Yet we ought not to perplex ourselves about this, since it may prove otherwise, that what is well got may come to one that will use it well and do good with it. (3.) He knows not whom he must leave it to (for God makes heirs), or at least what *he* will prove to whom he leaves it, whether *a wise man or a fool*, a wise man that will make it more or a fool that will bring it to nothing; *yet he shall have rule over all my labour*, and foolishly undo that which his father wisely did. It is probable that Solomon wrote this very feelingly, being afraid what Rehoboam would prove. St Jerome, in his commentary on this passage, applies this to the good books which Solomon wrote, in which he had shown himself wise, but he knew not into whose hands they would fall, perhaps into the hands of a fool, who, according to the perverseness of his heart, makes a bad use of what was well written. So that, upon the whole matter, he asks (v. 22), *What has man of all his labour?* What has he to himself and to his own use? What has he that will go with him into another world?

IV. The best use which is therefore to be made of the wealth of this world, and that is to use it cheerfully, to take the comfort of it, and do good with it. With this he concludes the chapter, v. 24–26. There is no true happiness to be found in these things. They are *vanity*, and, if happiness be expected from them, the disappointment will be *vexation of spirit*. But he will put us in a

way to make the best of them, and to avoid the inconveniences he had observed. We must neither over-toil ourselves, so as, in pursuit of more, to rob ourselves of the comfort of what we have, nor must we over-hoard for hereafter, nor lose our own enjoyment of what we have to lay it up for those that shall come after us, but serve ourselves out of it first. Observe,

1. What that good is which is here recommended to us; and which is the utmost pleasure and profit we can expect or extract from the business and profit of this world, and the furthest we can go to rescue it from its *vanity* and the *vexation* that is in it. (1.) We must do our duty with them, and be more in care how to use an estate well, for the ends for which we were entrusted with it, than how to raise or increase an estate. This is intimated v. 26, where *those* only are said to have the comfort of this life who are good in *God's sight*, and again, *good before God*, truly good, as Noah, whom *God saw righteous before him*. We must set God always before us, and give diligence in every thing to approve ourselves to him. The Chaldee-paraphrase says, *A man should make his soul to enjoy good by keeping the commandments of God and walking in the ways that are right before him*, and (v. 25) by *studying the words of the law, and being in care about the day of the great judgment that is to come*. (2.) We must take the comfort of them. These things will not make a happiness for the soul; all the good we can have out of them is for the body, and if we make use of them for the comfortable support of that, so that it may be fit to serve the soul and able to keep pace with it in the service of God, then they turn to a good account. *There is therefore nothing better for a man*, as to these things, than to allow himself a sober cheerful use of them, according as his rank and condition are, to have meat and drink out of them for himself, his family, his friends, and so delight his senses and make his *soul enjoy good*, all the good that is to be had out of them; do not lose that, in pursuit of that good which is not to be had out of them. But observe, He would not have us to give up business, and take our ease, that we may *eat and drink*; no, we must *enjoy good in our labour*; we must use these things, not to excuse us from, but to make us diligent and cheerful in, our worldly business. (3.) We must herein *acknowledge God*; we must see that *it is from the hand of God*, that is, [1.] The *good things* themselves that we enjoy are so, not only the products of his creating power, but the gifts of his providential bounty to us. And *then* they are truly pleasant to us when we take them from the hand of God as a Father, when we eye his wisdom giving us that which is fittest for us, and acquiesce in it, and taste his love and goodness, relish them, and are thankful for them. [2.] A heart to enjoy them is so; this is the gift of God's grace. Unless he give us wisdom to make a right use of what he has, in his providence, bestowed upon us, and withal peace of conscience, that we may discern God's favour in the world's smiles, we cannot make our souls enjoy any good in them.

2. Why we should have this in our eye, in the management of ourselves as to this world, and look up to God for it. (1.) Because Solomon himself, with all his possessions, could aim at no more and desire no better (v. 25): *"Who can hasten to this more than I? This is that which I was ambitious of: I wished for no more; and those that have but little, in comparison with what I have, may attain to this, to be content with what they have and enjoy the good of it."* Yet Solomon could not obtain it by his own wisdom, without the special grace of God, and therefore directs us to expect it from the hand of God and pray to him for it. (2.) Because riches are a blessing or a curse to a man according as he has or has not a heart to make good use of them. [1.] God makes them a reward to a good man, if with them he give him *wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*, to enjoy them cheerfully himself and to communicate them charitably to others. To those who are *good in God's sight*, who are of a good spirit, honest

and sincere, pay a deference to their God and have a tender concern for all mankind, *God will give wisdom and knowledge in this world, and joy with the righteous in the world to come*; so the Chaldee. Or he will give that wisdom and knowledge in things natural, moral, political, and divine, which will be a constant joy and pleasure to them. [2.] He makes them a punishment to a bad man if he denies him a heart to take the comfort of them, for they do but tantalize him and tyrannize over him: *To the sinner God gives by travail*, by leaving him to himself and his own foolish counsels, to *gather and to heap up* that, which, as to himself, will not only burden him like *thick clay* (Hab. 2:6), but be *a witness against him and eat his flesh as it were fire* (Jam. 5:3); while God designs, by an overruling providence, to give it to him that is *good before him*; for the *wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*, and *gathered for him that will pity the poor*. Note, *First, Godliness, with contentment, is great gain*; and *those only have true joy that are good in God's sight*, and that have it from him and in him. *Secondly*, Ungodliness is commonly punished with discontent and an insatiable covetousness, which are sins that are their own punishment. *Thirdly*, When God gives abundance to wicked men it is with design to force them to a resignation in favour of his own children, when they are of age and ready for it, as the Canaanites kept possession of the good land till the time appointed for Israel's entering upon it. [3.] The burden of the song is still the same: *This is also vanity and vexation of spirit*. It is vanity, at the best, even to the good man; when he has all that the sinner has scraped together it will not make him happy without something else; but it is *vexation of spirit* to the sinner to see what he had laid up enjoyed by him that is *good in God's sight*, and therefore evil in his. So that, take it which way you will, the conclusion is firm, *All is vanity and vexation of spirit*.

### Chapter 3

Solomon having shown the vanity of studies, pleasures, and business, and made it to appear that happiness is not to be found in the schools of the learned, nor in the gardens of Epicurus, nor upon the exchange, he proceeds, in this chapter, further to prove his doctrine, and the inference he had drawn from it, That therefore we should cheerfully content ourselves with, and make use of, what God has given us, by showing, I. The mutability of all human affairs (v. 1–10). II. The immutability of the divine counsels concerning them and the unsearchableness of those counsels (v. 11–15). III. The vanity of worldly honour and power, which are abused for the support of oppression and persecution if men be not governed by the fear of God in the use of them (v. 16). For a check to proud oppressors, and to show them their vanity, he reminds them, 1. That they will be called to account for it in the other world (v. 17). 2. That their condition, in reference to this world (for of that he speaks), is no better than that of the beasts (v. 18–21). And therefore he concludes that it is our wisdom to make use of what power we have for our own comfort, and not to oppress others with it.

#### Verses 1-10

The scope of these verses is to show, 1. That we live in a world of changes, that the several events of time, and conditions of human life, are vastly different from one another, and yet occur promiscuously, and we are continually passing and repassing between them, as in the revolutions of every day and every year. In the *wheel of nature* (Jam. 3:6) sometimes one spoke is uppermost and by and by the contrary; there is a constant ebbing and flowing, waxing and waning; from one extreme to the other does the *fashion of this world change*, ever did, and ever will. 2. That every change concerning us, with the time and season of it, is unalterably fixed and determined by a supreme power; and we must take things as they come, for it is not in our power to change what is appointed for us. And this comes in here as a reason why, when we are in prosperity, we should be easy, and yet not secure—not to be secure because we live in a world of changes and therefore have no reason to say, *Tomorrow shall be as this day* (the lowest valleys join to the highest mountains), and yet to be easy, and, as he had advised (ch. 2:24), *to enjoy the good of our labour*, in a humble dependence upon God and his providence, neither lifted up with hopes, nor cast down with fears, but with evenness of mind expecting every event. Here we have,

I. A general proposition laid down: *To every thing there is a season*, v. 1. 1. Those things which seem most contrary the one to the other will, in the revolution of affairs, each take their turn and come into play. The day will give place to the night and the night again to the day. Is it summer? It will be winter. Is it winter? Stay a while, and it will be summer. Every purpose has its time. The clearest sky will be clouded, *Post gaudia luctus—Joy succeeds sorrow*; and the most clouded sky will clear up, *Post nubila Phoebus—The sun will burst from behind the cloud*. 2. Those things which to us seem most casual and contingent are, in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, punctually determined, and the very hour of them is fixed, and can neither be anticipated nor adjourned a moment.

II. The proof and illustration of it by the induction of particulars, twenty-eight in number, according to the days of the moon's revolution, which is always increasing or decreasing between its full and change. Some of these changes are purely the act of

God, others depend more upon the will of man, but all are determined by the divine counsel. Every thing *under heaven* is thus changeable, but in heaven there is an unchangeable state, and an unchangeable counsel concerning these things. 1. There is *a time to be born and a time to die*. These are determined by the divine counsel; and, as we were born, so we must die, at the time appointed, Acts 17:26. Some observe that here is *a time to be born and a time to die*, but no time to live; that is so short that it is not worth mentioning; as soon as we are born we begin to die. But, as there is *a time to be born and a time to die*, so there will be a time to rise again, a set time when those that lie in the grave shall be remembered, Job 14:13. 2. *A time* for God *to plant* a nation, as that of Israel in Canaan, *and*, in order to that, *to pluck up* the seven nations *that were planted* there, to make room for them; and at length there was a time when God spoke concerning Israel too, *to pluck up and to destroy*, when the measure of their iniquity was full, Jer. 18:7, 9. There is *a time* for men *to plant*, a time of the year, a time of their lives; but, when *that which was planted* has grown fruitless and useless, it is *time to pluck it up*. 3. *A time to kill*, when the judgments of God are abroad in a land and lay all waste; but, when he returns in ways of mercy, then is *a time to heal* what *he has torn* (Hos. 6:1, 2), to comfort a people after the time that he has *afflicted them*, Ps. 90:15. There is a time when it is the wisdom of rulers to use severe methods, but there is a time when it is as much their wisdom to take a more gentle course, and to apply themselves to lenitives, not corrosives. 4. *A time to break down* a family, an estate, a kingdom, when it has ripened itself for destruction; but God will find *a time*, if they return and repent, to rebuild what he has broken down; there is *a time*, a set time, for the Lord *to build up Zion*, Ps. 102:13, 16. There is *a time* for men *to break up* house, and break off trade, and so *to break down*, which those that are busy in *building up* both must expect and prepare for. 5. *A time* when God's providence calls *to weep and mourn*, and when man's wisdom and grace will comply with the call, and will *weep and mourn*, as in times of common calamity and danger, and there it is very absurd to *laugh, and dance*, and make merry (Isa. 22:12, 13; Eze. 21:10); but then, on the other hand, there is a time when God calls to cheerfulness, *a time to laugh and dance*, and then he expects we should *serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart*. Observe, The time of mourning and weeping is put first, before that of laughter and dancing, for we must first *sow in tears* and then *reap in joy*. 6. *A time to cast away stones*, by breaking down and demolishing fortifications, when God gives peace in the borders, and there is no more occasion for them; but there is *a time to gather stones together*, for the making of strong-holds, v. 5. A time for old towers to fall, as that in Siloam (Lu. 12:4), and for the temple itself to be so ruined as that *not one stone should be left upon another*; but also a time for towers and trophies too to be erected, when national affairs prosper. 7. *A time to embrace* a friend when we find him faithful, but *a time to refrain from embracing* when we find he is unfair or unfaithful, and that we have cause to suspect him; it is then our prudence to be shy and keep at a distance. It is commonly applied to conjugal embraces, and explained by 1 Co. 7:3-5; Joel 2:16. 8. *A time to get*, get money, get preferment, get good bargains and a good interest, when opportunity smiles, a time when a wise man will *seek* (so the word is); when he is setting out in the world and has a growing family, when he is in his prime, when he prospers and has a run of business, then it is time for him to be busy and make hay when the sun shines. There is *a time to get* wisdom, and knowledge, and grace, when a man has a price put into his hand; but then let him expect there will come a time to spend, when all he has will be little enough to serve his turn. Nay, there will come *a time to lose*, when what has been soon got will be soon

scattered and cannot be held fast. 9. *A time to keep*, when we have use for what we have got, and can keep it without running the hazard of a good conscience; but there may come *a time to cast away*, when love to God may oblige us to cast away what we have, because we must deny Christ and wrong our consciences if we keep it (Mt. 10:37, 38), and rather to make shipwreck of all than of the faith; nay, when love to ourselves may oblige us to cast it away, when it is for the saving of our lives, as it was when Jonah's mariners heaved their cargo into the sea. 10. *A time to rend* the garments, as upon occasion of some great grief, *and a time to sew*, them again, in token that the grief is over. A time to undo what we have done and a time to do again what we have undone. Jerome applies this to the rending of the Jewish church and the sewing and making up of the gospel church thereupon. 11. *A time* when it becomes us, and is our wisdom and duty, *to keep silence*, when it is an *evil time* (Amos 5:13), when our speaking would be the *casting of pearl before swine*, or when we are in danger of speaking amiss (Ps. 39:2); but there is also *a time to speak* for the glory of God and the edification of others, when silence would be the betraying of a righteous cause, and when with the mouth confession is to be made to salvation; and it is a great part of Christian prudence to know when to speak and when to hold our peace. 12. *A time to love*, and to show ourselves friendly, to be free and cheerful, and it is a pleasant time; but there may come *a time to hate*, when we shall see cause to break off all familiarity with some that we have been fond of, and to be upon the reserve, as having found reason for a suspicion, which love is loth to admit. 13. *A time of war*, when God draws the sword for judgment and gives it commission to devour, when men draw the sword for justice and the maintaining of their rights, when there is in the nations a disposition to war; but we may hope for *a time of peace*, when the sword of the Lord shall be sheathed and he shall *make wars to cease* (Ps. 46:9), when the end of the war is obtained, and when there is on all sides a disposition to peace. War shall not last always, nor is there any peace to be called lasting on this side the everlasting peace. Thus in all these changes God has set the one over-against the other, that we may *rejoice as though we rejoiced not and weep as though we wept not*.

III. The inferences drawn from this observation. If our present state be subject to such vicissitude, 1. Then we must not expect our portion in it, for the good things of it are of no certainty, no continuance (v. 9): *What profit has he that works?* What can a man promise himself from planting and building, when that which he thinks is brought to perfection may so soon, and will so surely, be plucked up and broken down? All our pains and care will not alter either the mutable nature of the things themselves or the immutable counsel of God concerning them. 2. Then we must look upon ourselves as upon our probation in it. There is indeed no profit *in that wherein we labour*; the thing itself, when we have it, will do us little good; but, if we make a right use of the disposals of Providence about it, there will be profit in that (v. 10): *I have seen the travail which God has given to the sons of men*, not to make up a happiness by it, but *to be exercised in it*, to have various graces exercised by the variety of events, to have their dependence upon God tried by every change, and to be trained up to it, and taught both *how to want and how to abound*, Phil. 4:12. Note, (1.) There is a great deal of toil and trouble to be seen among the children of men. Labour and sorrow fill the world. (2.) This toil and this trouble are what God has allotted us. He never intended this world for our rest, and therefore never appointed us to take our ease in it. (3.) To many it proves a gift. God gives it to men, as the physician gives a medicine to his patient, to do him good. This travail is given to us to make us weary of the world and desirous of the remaining

rest. It is given to us that we may be kept in action, and may always have something to do; for we were none of us sent into the world to be idle. Every change cuts us out some new work, which we should be more solicitous about, than about the event.

### **Verses 11-15**

We have seen what changes there are in the world, and must not expect to find the world more sure to us than it has been to others. Now here Solomon shows the hand of God in all those changes; it is he that has made every creature to be that to us which it is, and therefore we must have our eye always upon him.

I. We must make the best of *that which is*, and must believe it best for the present, and accommodate ourselves to it: *He has made every thing beautiful in his time* (v. 11), and therefore, while its time lasts, we must be reconciled to it: nay, we must please ourselves with the beauty of it. Note, 1. Every thing is as God has made it; it is really as he appointed it to be, not as it appears to us. 2. That which to us seems most unpleasant is yet, in its proper time, altogether becoming. Cold is as becoming in winter as heat in summer; and the night, in its turn, is a black beauty, as the day, in its turn, is a bright one. 3. There is a wonderful harmony in the divine Providence and all its disposals, so that the events of it, when they come to be considered in their relations and tendencies, together with the seasons of them, will appear very beautiful, to the glory of God and the comfort of those that trust in him. Though we see not the complete beauty of Providence, yet we shall see it, and a glorious sight it will be, when the mystery of God shall be finished. Then every thing shall appear to have been done in the most proper time and it will be the wonder of eternity, Deu. 32:4. Eze. 1:18.

II. We must wait with patience for the full discovery of that which to us seems intricate and perplexed, acknowledging that we *cannot find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end*, and therefore must judge nothing before the time. We are to believe that God has made all beautiful. Every thing is done well, as in creation, so in providence, and we shall see it when the end comes, but till then we are incompetent judges of it. While the picture is in drawing, and the house in building, we see not the beauty of either; but when the artist has put his last hand to them, and given them their finishing strokes, then all appears very good. We see but the middle of God's works, not from the beginning of them (then we should see how admirably the plan was laid in the divine counsels), nor to the end of them, which crowns the action (then we should see the product to be glorious), but we must wait till the veil be rent, and not arraign God's proceedings nor pretend to pass judgment on them.

*Secret things belong not to us.* Those words, *He has set the world in their hearts*, are differently understood. 1. Some make them to be a reason why we may know more of God's works than we do; so Mr. Pemble: "God has not left himself without witness of his righteous, equal, and beautiful ordering of things, but has set it forth, to be observed in the book of *the world*, and this he has *set in men's hearts*, given man a large desire, and a power, in good measure, to comprehend and understand the history of nature, with the course of human affairs, so that, if men did but give themselves to the exact observation of things, they might in most of them perceive an admirable order and contrivance." 2. Others make them to be a reason why we do not know so much of God's works as we might; so bishop Reynolds: "We have the world so much in our hearts, are so taken up with thoughts and cares of worldly things, and are so exercised in our travail concerning them, that we have neither time nor spirit to eye God's hand in them." The world has not only gained possession of the heart, but has formed prejudices there

against the beauty of God's works.

III. We must be pleased with our lot in this world, and cheerfully acquiesce in the will of God concerning us, and accommodate ourselves to it. *There is no certain, lasting, good in these things; what good there is in them we are here told, v. 12, 13.* We must make a good use of them, 1. For the benefit of others. All the *good* there is *in them* is *to do good* with them, to our families, to our neighbours, to the poor, to the public, to its civil and religious interests. What have we our beings, capacities, and estates for, but to be some way serviceable to our generation? We mistake if we think we were born for ourselves. No; it is our business *to do good*; it is in doing good that there is the truest pleasure, and what is so laid out is best laid up and will turn to the best account. Observe, It is *to do good in this life*, which is short and uncertain; we have but a little time to be doing good in, and therefore had need to redeem time. It is *in this life*, where we are in a state of trial and probation for another life. Every man's life is his opportunity of doing that which will make for him in eternity. 2. For our own comfort. Let us make ourselves easy, *rejoice, and enjoy the good of our labour, as it is the gift of God*, and so enjoy God in it, and taste his love, return him thanks, and make him the centre of our joy, *eat and drink to his glory, and serve him with joyfulness of heart, in the abundance of all things*. If all things in this world be so uncertain, it is a foolish thing for men sordidly to spare for the present, that they may hoard up all for hereafter; it is better to live cheerfully and usefully upon what we have, and let tomorrow *take thought for the things of itself*. Grace and wisdom to do this *is the gift of God*, and it is a good gift, which crowns the gifts of his providential bounty.

IV. We must be entirely satisfied in all the disposals of the divine Providence, both as to personal and public concerns, and bring our minds to them, because God, in all, performs the thing that is appointed for us, acts according to the counsel of his will; and we are here told, 1. That that counsel cannot be altered, and therefore it is our wisdom to make a virtue of necessity, by submitting to it. It must be as God wills: *I know* (and every one knows it that knows any thing of God) *that whatsoever God does it shall be for ever, v. 14. He is in one mind, and who can turn him?* His measures are never broken, nor is he ever put upon new counsels, but what he has purposed shall be effected, and all the world cannot defeat nor disannul it. It behoves us therefore to say, "Let it be as God wills," for, how cross soever it may be to our designs and interests, God's will is his wisdom. 2. That that counsel needs not to be altered, for there is nothing amiss in it, nothing that can be amended. If we could see it altogether at one view, we should see it so perfect that *nothing can be put to it*, for there is no deficiency in it, *nor any thing taken from it*, for there is nothing in it unnecessary, or that can be spared. As the word of God, so the works of God are every one of them perfect in its kind, and it is presumption for us either to add to them or to diminish from them, Deu. 4:2. It is therefore as much our interest, as our duty, to bring our wills to the will of God.

V. We must study to answer God's end in all his providences, which is in general to make us religious. *God does all that men should fear before him*, to convince them that there is a God above them that has a sovereign dominion over them, at whose disposal they are and all their ways, and in whose hands their times are and all events concerning them, and that therefore they ought to have their eyes ever towards him, to worship and adore him, to acknowledge him in all their ways, to be careful in every thing to please him, and afraid of offending him in any thing. God thus changes his disposals, and yet is unchangeable in

his counsels, not to perplex us, much less to drive us to despair, but to teach us our duty to him and engage us to do it. That which God designs in the government of the world is the support and advancement of religion among men.

VI. Whatever changes we see or feel in this world, we must acknowledge the inviolable steadiness of God's government. The sun rises and sets, the moon increases and decreases, and yet both are where they were, and their revolutions are in the same method from the beginning according to *the ordinances of heaven*; so it is with the events of Providence (v. 15): *That which has been is now*. God has not of late begun to use this method. No; things were always as mutable and uncertain as they are now, and so they will be: *That which is to be has already been*; and therefore we speak inconsiderately when we say, "Surely the world was never so bad as it is now," or "None ever met with such disappointments as we meet with," or "The times will never mend;" they may mend with us, and after a time to mourn there may come a time to rejoice, but that will still be liable to the common character, to the common fate. The world, as it has been, is and will be constant in inconstancy; for *God requires that which is past*, that is, repeats what he has formerly done and deals with us no otherwise than as he has used to deal with good men; and *shall the earth be forsaken for us, or the rock removed out of his place?* There has no change befallen us, nor any temptation by it overtaken us, *but such as is common to men*. Let us not be proud and secure in prosperity, for God may recall a past trouble, and order that to seize us and spoil our mirth (Ps. 30:7); nor let us despond in adversity, for God may call back the comforts that are past, as he did to Job. We may apply this to our past actions, and our behaviour under the changes that have affected us. God will call us to account for *that which is past*; and therefore, when we enter into a new condition, we should judge ourselves for our sins in our former condition, prosperous or afflicted.

### **Verses 16-22**

Solomon is still showing that every thing in this world, without piety and the fear of God, is vanity. Take away religion, and there is nothing valuable among men, nothing for the sake of which a wise man would think it worth while to live in this world. In these verses he shows that power (than which there is nothing men are more ambitious of) and life itself (than which there is nothing men are more fond, more jealous of) are nothing without the fear of God.

I. Here is the vanity of man as mighty, man in his best estate, man upon the throne, where his authority is submitted to, man upon the judgment-seat, where his wisdom and justice are appealed to, and where, if he be governed by the laws of religion, he is God's vicegerent; nay, he is of those to whom it is said, *You are gods*; but without the fear of God it *is vanity*, for, set that aside, and,

1. The judge will not judge aright, will not use his power well, but will abuse it; instead of doing good with it he will do hurt with it, and then it is not only vanity, but a lie, a cheat to himself and to all about him, v. 16. Solomon perceived, by what he had read of former times, what he heard of other countries, and what he had seen in some corrupt judges, even in the land of Israel, notwithstanding all his care to prefer good men, that there was *wickedness in the place of judgment*. It is not so above the sun: far be it from God that he should do iniquity, or pervert justice. But *under the sun* it is often found that that which should be the refuge, proves the prison, of oppressed innocency. *Man being in honour, and not understanding* what he ought to do, *becomes like the beasts that perish*, like the beasts of prey, even the most ravenous, Ps. 49:20. Not only from the persons

that sat in judgment, but even *in the places* where judgment was, in pretence, administered, and righteousness was expected, *there was iniquity*; men met with the greatest wrongs in those courts to which they fled for justice. This is *vanity and vexation*; for, (1.) It would have been better for the people to have had no judges than to have had such. (2.) It would have been better for the judges to have had no power than to have had it and used it to such ill purposes; and so they will say another day.

2. The judge will himself be judged for not judging aright. When Solomon saw how judgment was perverted among men he looked up to God the Judge, and looked forward to the day of his judgment (v. 17): "*I said in my heart that this unrighteous judgment is not so conclusive as both sides take it to be, for there will be a review of the judgment; God shall judge between the righteous and the wicked, shall judge for the righteous and plead their cause, though now it is run down, and judge against the wicked and reckon with them for all their unrighteous decrees and the grievousness which they have prescribed,*" Isa. 10:1. With an eye of faith we may see, not only the period, but the punishment of the pride and cruelty of oppressors (Ps. 92:7), and it is an unspeakable comfort to the oppressed that their cause will be heard over again. Let them therefore wait with patience, for there is another *Judge that stands before the door*. And, though the day of affliction may last long, yet *there is a time*, a set time, for the examination of *every purpose, and every work* done under the sun. Men have their day now, but God's day is coming, Ps. 37:13. With God *there is a time* for the re-hearing of causes, redressing of grievances, and reversing of unjust decrees, though as yet we see it not here, Job 24:1.

II. Here is the vanity of man as mortal. He now comes to speak more generally *concerning the estate of the sons of men* in this world, their life and being on earth, and shows that their reason, without religion and the fear of God, advances them but little above the beasts. Now observe,

1. What he aims at in this account of man's estate. (1.) That God may be honoured, may be justified, may be glorified—*that they might clear God* (so the margin reads it), that if men have an uneasy life in this world, full of vanity and vexation, they may thank themselves and lay no blame on God; let them clear him, and not say that he made this world to be man's prison and life to be his penance; no, God made man, in respect both of honour and comfort, *little lower than the angels*; if he be mean and miserable, it is his own fault. Or, *that God* (that is, the world of God) *might manifest them*, and discover them to themselves, and so appear to be *quick and powerful*, and a judge of men's characters; and we may be made sensible how open we lie to God's knowledge and judgment. (2.) That men may be humbled, may be vilified, may be mortified—*that they might see that they themselves are beasts*. It is no easy matter to convince proud men that *they are but men* (Ps. 9:20), much more to convince bad men *that they are beasts*, that, being destitute of religion, they are as *the beasts that perish*, as *the horse and the mule that have no understanding*. Proud oppressors are as beasts, as *roaring lions and ranging bears*. Nay, every man that minds his body only, and not his soul, makes himself no better than a brute, and must wish, at least, to die like one.

2. The manner in which he verifies this account. That which he undertakes to prove is that a worldly, carnal, earthly-minded man, *has no preeminence above the beast, for all that* which he sets his heart upon, places his confidence, and expects a happiness in, *is vanity*, v. 19. Some make this to be the language of an atheist, who justifies himself in his iniquity (v. 16) and evades the argument taken from the judgment to come (v. 17) by pleading that there is not another life after this, but that when

man dies there is an end of him, and therefore while he lives he may live as he lists; but others rather think Solomon here speaks as he himself thinks, and that it is to be understood in the same sense with that of his father (Ps. 49:14), *Like sheep they are laid in the grave*, and that he intends to show the vanity of this world's wealth and honours "By the equal condition in mere outward respects (as bishop Reynolds expounds it) between men and beasts," (1.) The events concerning both seem much alike (v. 19); *That which befalls the sons of men* is no other than that which *befalls beasts*; a great deal of knowledge of human bodies is gained by the anatomy of the bodies of brutes. When the deluge swept away the old world the beasts perished with mankind. Horses and men are killed in battle with the same weapons of war. (2.) The end of both, to an eye of sense, seems alike too: *They have all one breath*, and breathe in the same air, and it is the general description of both that *in their nostrils is the breath of life* (Gen. 7:22), and therefore, *as the one dies, so dies the other*; in their expiring there is no visible difference, but death makes much the same change with a beast that it does with a man. [1.] As to their bodies, the change is altogether the same, except the different respects that are paid to them by the survivors. Let a man be *buried with the burial of an ass* (Jer. 22:19) and what preëminence then has he *above a beast*? The touch of the dead body of a man, by the law of Moses, contracted a greater ceremonial pollution than the touch of the carcase even of an unclean beast or fowl. And Solomon here observes that *all go unto one place*; the dead bodies of men and beasts putrefy alike; *all are of the dust*, in their original, for we see *all turn to dust again* in their corruption. What little reason then have we to be proud of our bodies, or any bodily accomplishments, when they must not only be reduced to the earth very shortly, but must be so in common with the beasts, and we must mingle our dust with theirs! [2.] As to their spirits there is indeed a vast difference, but not a visible one, v. 21. It is certain that *the spirit of the sons of men at death is ascending*; it *goes upwards* to the Father of spirits, who made it, to the world of spirits to which it is allied; it dies not with the body, but *is redeemed from the power of the grave*, Ps. 49:15. It *goes upwards* to be judged and determined to an unchangeable state. It is certain that *the spirit of the beast goes downwards to the earth*; it dies with the body; it perishes and is gone at death. The soul of a beast is, at death, like a candle blown out—there is an end of it; whereas the soul of a man is then like a candle taken out of a dark lantern, which leaves the lantern useless indeed, but does itself shine brighter. This great difference there is between the spirits of men and beasts; and a good reason it is why men should *set their affections on things above*, and lift up their souls to those things, not suffering them, as if they were the souls of brutes, to cleave to this earth. But *who knows* this difference? We cannot see the ascent of the one and the descent of the other with our bodily eyes; and therefore those that live by sense, as all carnal sensualists do, that *walk in the sight of their eyes* and will not admit any other discoveries, by their own rule of judgment have no *preëminence above the beasts*. *Who knows*, that is, who considers this? Isa. 53:1. Very few. Were it better considered, the world would be every way better; but most men live as if they were to be here always, or as if when they die there were an end of them; and it is not strange that those live like beasts who think they shall die like beasts, but on such the noble faculties of reason are perfectly lost and thrown away.

3. An inference drawn from it (v. 22): *There is nothing better*, as to this world, nothing better to be had out of our wealth and honour, *than that a man should rejoice in his own works*, that is, (1.) Keep a clear conscience, and never admit *iniquity into the place of righteousness*. *Let every man prove his own work*, and approve himself to God in it, *so shall he have rejoicing in*

*himself alone*, Gal. 6:4. Let him not get nor keep any thing but what he can rejoice in. See 2 Co. 1:12. (2.) Live a cheerful life. If God have prospered the work of our hands unto us, let us rejoice in it, and take the comfort of it, and not make it a burden to ourselves and leave others the joy of it; *for that is our portion*, not the portion of our souls (miserable are those that have their portion in this life, Ps. 17:14, and fools are those that choose it and take up with it, Lu. 12:19), but it is the portion of the body; that only which we enjoy is ours out of this world; it is taking what is to be had and making the best of it, and the reason is because none can give us a sight of *what shall be after us*, either who shall have our estates or what use they will make of them. When we are gone it is likely we shall not see what is after us; there is no correspondence that we know of between the other world and this, Job 14:21. Those in the other world will be wholly taken up with that world, so that they will not care for seeing what is done in this; and while we are here we cannot foresee *what shall be after us*, either as to our families or the public. *It is not for us to know the times and seasons that shall be after us*, which, as it should be a restraint to our cares about this world, so it should be a reason for our concern about another. Since death is a final farewell to this life, let us look before us to another life.

#### Chapter 4

Solomon, having shown the vanity of this world in the temptation which those in power feel to oppress and trample upon their subjects, here further shows, I. The temptation which the oppressed feel to discontent and impatience (v. 1-3). II. The temptation which those that love their case feel to take their case and neglect business, for fear of being envied (v. 4-6). III. The folly of hoarding up abundance of worldly wealth (v. 7, 8). IV. A remedy against that folly, in being made sensible of the benefit of society and mutual assistance (v. 9-12). V. The mutability even of royal dignity, not only through the folly of the prince himself (v. 13, 14), but through the fickleness of the people, let the prince be ever so discreet (v. 15, 16). It is not the prerogative even of kings themselves to be exempted from the vanity and vexation that attend these things; let none else then expect it.

#### Verses 1-3

Solomon had a large soul (1 Ki. 4:29) and it appeared by this, among other things, that he had a very tender concern for the miserable part of mankind and took cognizance of the afflictions of the afflicted. He had taken the oppressors to task (ch. 3:16, 17) and put them in mind of the judgment to come, to be a curb to their insolence; now here he observes the oppressed. This he did, no doubt, as a prince, to do them justice and *avenge them of their adversaries*, for he both *feared God and regarded men*; but here he does it as a preacher, and shows,

I. The troubles of their condition (v. 1); of these he speaks very feelingly and with compassion. It grieved him, 1. To see might prevailing against right, to see so much *oppression done under the sun*, to see servants, and labourers, and poor workmen, oppressed by their masters, who take advantage of their necessity to impose what terms they please upon them, debtors oppressed by cruel creditors and creditors too by fraudulent debtors, tenants oppressed by hard landlords and orphans by treacherous guardians, and, worst of all, subjects oppressed by arbitrary princes and unjust judges. Such *oppressions are done under the sun*; above the sun righteousness reigns for ever. Wise men will *consider these oppressions*, and contrive to do something for the relief of those that are oppressed. *Blessed is he that considers the poor*. 2. To see how those that were wronged laid to heart the wrongs that were done them. He *beheld the tears of such as were oppressed*, and perhaps could not forbear weeping with them. The world is a place of weepers; look which way we will, we have a melancholy scene presented to us, *the tears of those that are oppressed* with one trouble or other. They find it is to no purpose to complain, and therefore mourn in secret (as Job, ch. 16:20; 30:28); but *Blessed are those that mourn*. 3. To see how unable they were to help themselves: *On the side of their oppressors there was power*, when they had done wrong, to stand to it and make good what they had done, so that the poor were borne down with a strong hand and had no way to obtain redress. It is sad to see power misplaced, and that which was given men to enable them to do good perverted to support them in doing wrong. 4. To see how they and their calamities were slighted by all about them. They wept and needed comfort, but there was none to do that friendly office: *They had no comforter*; their oppressors were powerful and threatening, and therefore *they had no comforter*; those that should have comforted them durst not, for fear of displeasing the oppressors and being made their companions for

offering to be their comforters. It is sad to see so little humanity among men.

II. The temptations of their condition. Being thus hardly used, they are tempted to hate and despise life, and to envy those that are dead and in their graves, and to wish they had never been born (v. 2, 3); and Solomon is ready to agree with them, for it serves to prove that *all is vanity and vexation*, since life itself is often so; and if we disregard it, in comparison with the favour and fruition of God (as St. Paul, Acts 20:24, Phil. 1:23), it is our praise, but, if (as here) only for the sake of the miseries that attend it, it is our infirmity, and we judge therein after the flesh, as Job and Elijah did. 1. He here thinks those happy who have ended this miserable life, have done their part and quitted the stage; "*I praised the dead that are already dead*, slain outright, or that had a speedy passage through the world, made a short cut over the ocean of life, dead already, before they had well begun to live; I was pleased with their lot, and, had it been in their own choice, should have praised their wisdom for but looking into the world and then retiring, as not liking it. I concluded that it is better with them than with *the living that are yet alive* and that is all, dragging the long and heavy chain of life, and wearing out its tedious minutes." This may be compared not with Job 3:20, 21, but with Rev. 14:13, where, in times of persecution (and such Solomon is here describing), it is not the passion of man, but the Spirit of God, that says, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth*. Note, The condition of the saints that are dead, and gone to rest with God, is upon many accounts better and more desirable than the condition of living saints that are yet continued in their work and warfare. 2. He thinks those happy who never began this miserable life; nay, they are happiest of all: *He that has not been is happier than both they*. Better never to have been born than be born to *see the evil work that is done under the sun*, to see so much wickedness committed, so much wrong done, and not only to be in no capacity to mend the matter, but to suffer ill for doing well. A good man, how calamitous a condition soever he is in in this world, cannot have cause to wish he had never been born, since he is glorifying the Lord even in the fires, and will be happy at last, for ever happy. Nor ought any to wish so while they are alive, for while there is life there is hope; a man is never undone till he is in hell.

#### **Verses 4-6**

Here Solomon returns to the observation and consideration of the vanity and vexation of spirit that attend the business of this world, which he had spoken of before, ch. 2:11.

I. If a man be acute, and dexterous, and successful in his business, he gets the ill-will of *his neighbours*, v. 4. Though he takes a great deal of pains, and goes through *all travail*, does not get his estate easily, but it costs him a great deal of hard labour, nor does he get it dishonestly, he wrongs no man, defrauds no man, but by *every right work*, by applying himself to his own proper business, and managing it by all the rules of equity and fair dealing, yet *for this he is envied of his neighbour*, and the more for the reputation he has got by his honesty. This shows, 1. What little conscience most men have, that they will bear a grudge to a neighbour, give him an ill word and do him an ill turn, only because he is more ingenious and industrious than themselves, and has more of the blessing of heaven. Cain envied Abel, Esau Jacob, and Saul David, and all for their right works. This is downright diabolism. 2. What little comfort wise and useful men must expect to have in this world. Let them behave themselves ever so cautiously, they cannot escape being envied; and *who can stand before envy?* Prov. 27:4. Those that excel

in virtue will always be an eye-sore to those that exceed in vice, which should not discourage us from any right work, but drive us to expect the praise of it, not from men, but from God, and not to count upon satisfaction and happiness in the creature; for, if *right works* prove *vanity and vexation of spirit*, no works *under the sun* can prove otherwise. But for *every right work* a man shall be accepted of his God, and then he needs not mind though he be *envied of his neighbour*, only it may make him love the world the less.

II. If a man be stupid, and dull, and blundering in his business, he does ill for himself (v. 5): *The fool* that goes about his work as if *his hands* were muffled and *folded together*, that does every thing awkwardly, *the sluggard* (for he is a fool) that loves his ease and *folds his hands together* to keep them warm, because they refuse to labour, he *eats his own flesh*, is a cannibal to himself, brings himself into such a poor condition that he has nothing to eat but his own flesh, into such a desperate condition that he is ready to eat his own flesh for vexation. He has a dog's life—hunger and ease. Because he sees active men that thrive in the world envied, he runs into the other extreme; and, lest he should be envied for his right works, he does every thing wrong, and does not deserve to be pitied. Note, Idleness is a sin that is its own punishment. The following words (v. 6), *Better is a handful with quietness than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit*, may be taken either, 1. As the sluggard's argument for the excuse of himself in his idleness. He *folds his hands together*, and abuses and misapplies a good truth for his justification, as if, because *a little with quietness is better than abundance with strife*, therefore a little with idleness is better than abundance with honest labour: thus *wise in his own conceit* is he, Prov. 26:16. But, 2. I rather take it as Solomon's advice to keep the mean between that *travail* which will make *a man envied* and that slothfulness which will make a man *eat his own flesh*. Let us by honest industry lay hold on the handful, that we may not want necessaries, but not grasp at both the hands full, which will but create us vexation of spirit. Moderate pains and moderate gains will do best. A man may have but a handful of the world, and yet may enjoy it and himself with a great deal of *quietness*, with content of mind, peace of conscience, and the love and good-will of his neighbours, while many that have both their hands full, have more than heart could wish, have a great deal of travail and vexation with it. Those that cannot live on a little, it is to be feared, would not live as they should if they had ever so much.

### **Verses 7-12**

Here Solomon fastens upon another instance of the vanity of this world, that frequently the more men have of it the more they would have; and on this they are so intent that they have no enjoyment of what they have. Now Solomon here shows, I. That selfishness is the cause of this evil (v. 7, 8): *There is one alone*, that minds none but himself, cares for nobody, but would, if he could, be placed alone in the midst of the earth; *there is not a second*, nor does he desire there should be: one mouth he thinks enough in a house, and grudges every thing that goes beside him. See how this covetous muckworm is here described. 1. He makes himself a mere slave to his business. Though *he has* no charge, *neither child nor brother*, none to take care of but himself, none to hang upon him, or draw from him, no poor relations, nor dares he marry, for fear of the expense of a family, *yet is there no end of his labour*; he is at it night and day, early and late, and will scarcely allow necessary rest to himself and those he employs. He does not confine himself within the bounds of his own calling, but is for having a hand in

any thing that he can get by. See Ps. 127:2. 2. He never thinks he has enough: *His eye is not satisfied with riches*. Covetousness is called *the lust of the eye* (1 Jn. 2:16) because the *beholding of it with his eyes* is all that the worldling seems to covet, Eccl. 5:11. He has enough for his back (as bishop Reynolds observes), for his belly, for his calling, for his family, for his living decently in the world, but he has not enough for his eyes. Though he can but see it, can but count his money, and not find in his heart to use it, yet he is not easy because he has not more to regale his eyes with. 3. He denies himself the comfort of what he has: he *bereaves his soul of good*. If our souls are bereaved of good, it is we ourselves that do bereave them. Others may bereave us of outward good, but cannot rob us of our graces and comforts, our spiritual good things. It is our own fault if we do not enjoy ourselves. Yet many are so set upon the world that, in pursuit of it, they *bereave their souls of good* here and for ever, make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, bereave themselves not only of the favour of God and eternal life, but of the pleasures of this world too and this present life. Worldly people, pretending to be wise for themselves, are really enemies to themselves. 4. He has no excuse for doing this: *He has neither child nor brother*, none that he is bound to, on whom he may lay out what he has to his satisfaction while he lives, none that he has a kindness for, for whom he may lay it up to his satisfaction and to whom he may leave it when he dies, none that are poor or dear to him. 5. He has not consideration enough to show himself the folly of this. He never puts this question to himself, "*For whom do I labour* thus? Do I labour, as I should, for the glory of God, and that I may have to give to those that need? Do I consider that it is but for the body that I am labouring, a dying body; it is for others, and I know not for whom—perhaps for a fool, that will scatter it as fast as I have gathered it—perhaps for a foe, that will be ungrateful to my memory?" Note, It is wisdom for those that take pains about this world to consider whom they take all this pains for, and whether it be really worth while to bereave themselves of good that they may bestow it on a stranger. If men do not consider this, it is *vanity, and a sore travail*; they shame and vex themselves to no purpose.

II. That sociableness is the cure of this evil. Men are thus sordid because they are all for themselves. Now Solomon shows here, by divers instances, that *it is not good for man to be alone* (Gen. 2:18); he designs hereby to recommend to us both marriage and friendship, two things which covetous misers decline, because of the charge of them; but such are the comfort and advantage of them both, if prudently contracted, that they will very well quit cost. Man, in paradise itself, could not be happy without a mate, and therefore is no sooner made than matched. 1. Solomon lays this down for a truth, That *two are better than one*, and more happy jointly than either of them could be separately, more pleased in one another than they could be in themselves only, mutually serviceable to each other's welfare, and by a united strength more likely to do good to others: *They have a good reward of their labour*; whatever service they do, it is returned to them another way. He that serves himself only has himself only for his paymaster, and commonly proves more unjust and ungrateful to himself than his friend, if he should serve him, would be to him; witness him that *labours endlessly* and yet *bereaves his soul of good*; he has no *reward of his labour*. But he that is kind to another has a *good reward*; the pleasure and advantage of holy love will be an abundant recompence for all the *work and labour of love*. Hence Solomon infers the mischief of solitude: *Woe to him that is alone*. He lies exposed to many temptations which good company and friendship would prevent and help him to guard against; he wants

that advantage which a man has by the countenance of his friend, as iron has of being sharpened by iron. A monastic life then was surely never intended for a state of perfection, nor should those be reckoned the greatest lovers of God who cannot find in their hearts to love any one else. 2. He proves it by divers instances of the benefit of friendship and good conversation. (1.) Occasional succour in an exigency. It is good for two to travel together, *for if one happen to fall*, he may be lost for want of a little help. If a man fall *into sin*, his friend will help to *restore him with the spirit of meekness*; if he fall into trouble, his friend will help to comfort him and assuage his grief. (2.) Mutual warmth. As a fellow-traveller is of use (*amicus pro vehiculo—a friend is a good substitute for a carriage*) so is a bedfellow: *If two lie together, they have heat*. So virtuous and gracious affections are excited by good society, and Christians warm one another by *provoking one another to love and to good works*. (3.) United strength. If an enemy find a man alone, he is likely to *prevail against him*; with his own single strength he cannot make his part good, but, if he have a second, he may do well enough: *two shall withstand him*. "You shall help me against my enemy, and I will help you against yours;" according to the agreement between Joab and Abishai (2 Sa. 10:11), and so both are conquerors; whereas, acting separately, both would have been conquered; as was said of the ancient Britons, when the Romans invaded them, *Dum singuli pugnant, universi vincuntur—While they fight in detached parties, they sacrifice the general cause*. In our spiritual warfare we may be helpful to one another as well as in our spiritual work; next to the comfort of communion with God, is that of the communion of saints. He concludes with this proverb, *A threefold cord is not easily broken*, any more than a bundle of arrows, though each single thread, and each single arrow, is. Two together he compares to *a threefold cord*; for where two are closely joined in holy love and fellowship, Christ will by his Spirit come to them, and make the third, as he joined himself to the two disciples going to Emmaus, and then there is *a threefold cord* that can never be *broken*. *They that dwell in love, dwell in God, and God in them*.

### **Verses 13-16**

Solomon was himself a king, and therefore may be allowed to speak more freely than another concerning the vanity of kingly state and dignity, which he shows here to be an uncertain thing; he had before said so (Prov. 27:24, *The crown doth not endure to every generation*), and his son found it so. Nothing is more slippery than the highest post of honour without wisdom and the people's love.

I. A king is not happy unless he have wisdom, v. 13, 14. He that is truly *wise*, prudent, and pious, though he be *poor* in the world, and very young, and upon both accounts despised and little taken notice of, *is better*, more truly valuable and worthy of respect, is likely to do better for himself and to be a greater blessing to his generation, *than a king, than an old king*, and therefore venerable both for his gravity and for his dignity, if he be *foolish*, and knows not how to manage public affairs himself nor *will be admonished* and advised by others—*who* knows not to *be admonished*, that is, will not suffer any counsel or admonition to be given him (no one about him dares contradict him) or will not hearken to the counsel and admonition that are given him. It is so far from being any part of the honour of kings that it is the greatest dishonour to them that can be not to *be admonished*. Folly and wilfulness commonly go together, and those that most need admonition can worst bear it; but neither age nor titles will secure men respect if they have not true wisdom and virtue to recommend them; while wisdom and virtue

will gain men honour even under the disadvantages of youth and poverty. To prove the *wise child better than the foolish king* he shows what each of them comes to, v. 14. 1. *A poor man* by his wisdom comes to be preferred, as Joseph, who, when he was but young, was brought *out of prison* to be *the second* man in the kingdom, to which story Solomon seems here to refer. Providence sometimes *raises the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes*, Ps. 113:7, 8. Wisdom has wrought not only the liberty of men, but their dignity, raised them from the dunghill, from the dungeon, to the throne. 2. *A king* by his folly and wilfulness comes to be impoverished. Though he was *born in his kingdom*, came to it by inheritance, though he has lived to be old in it and has had time to fill his treasures, yet if he take ill courses, and *will no more be admonished* as he has been, thinking, because he is old, he is past it, he *becomes poor*; his treasure is exhausted, and perhaps he is forced to resign his crown and retire into privacy.

II. A king is not likely to continue if he have not a confirmed interest in the affections of the people; this is intimated, but somewhat obscurely, in the last two verses. 1. He that is king must have a successor, a *second*, a *child that shall stand up in his stead*, his own, suppose, or perhaps that *poor and wise child* spoken of, v. 13. Kings, when they grow old, must have the mortification of seeing those that are to jostle them out and stand up in their stead. 2. It is common with the people to adore the rising sun: *All the living who walk under the sun* are *with the second child*, are in his interests, are conversant with him, and make their court to him more than to the father, whom they look upon as going off, and despise because his best days are past. Solomon considered this; he saw this to be the disposition of his own people, which appeared immediately after his death, in their complaints of his government and their affectation of a change. 3. People are never long easy and satisfied: *There is no end*, no rest, *of all the people*; they are continually fond of changes, and know not what they would have. 4. This is no new thing, but it has been the way *of all that have been before them*; there have been instances of this in every age: even Samuel and David could not always please. 5. As it has been, so it is likely to be still: *Those that come after* will be of the same spirit, and *shall not long rejoice in him* whom at first they seemed extremely fond of. To-day, *Hosanna*—tomorrow, *Crucify*. 6. It cannot but be a great grief to princes to see themselves thus slighted by those they have studied to oblige and have depended upon; there is no faith in man, no stedfastness. *This is vanity and vexation of spirit*.

## Chapter 5

Solomon, in this chapter, discourses, I. Concerning the worship of God, prescribing that as a remedy against all those vanities which he had already observed to be in wisdom, learning, pleasure, honour, power, and business. That we may not be deceived by those things, nor have our spirits vexed with the disappointments we meet with in them, let us make conscience of our duty to God and keep up our communion with him; but, withal, he gives a necessary caution against the vanities which are to often found in religious exercises, which deprive them of their excellency and render them unable to help against other vanities. If our religion be a vain religion, how great is that vanity! Let us therefore take heed of vanity, 1. In hearing the word, and offering sacrifice (v. 1). 2. In prayer (v. 2, 3). 3. In making vows (v. 4-6). 4. In pretending to divine dreams (v. 7). Now, (1.) For a remedy against those vanities, he prescribes the fear of God (v. 7). (2.) To prevent the offence that might arise from the present sufferings of good people, he directs us to look up to God (v. 8). II. Concerning the wealth of this world and the vanity and vexation that attend it. The fruits of the earth indeed are necessary to the support of life (v. 9), but as for silver, and gold, and riches, 1. They are unsatisfying (v. 10). 2. They are unprofitable (v. 11). 3. They are disquieting (v. 12). 4. They often prove hurtful and destroying (v. 13). 5. They are perishing (v. 14). 6. They must be left behind when we die (v. 15, 16). 7. If we have not a heart to make use of them, they occasion a great deal of uneasiness (v. 17). And therefore he recommends to us the comfortable use of that which God has given us, with an eye to him that is the giver, as the best way both to answer the end of our having it and to obviate the mischiefs that commonly attend great estates (v. 18-20). So that if we can but learn out of this chapter how to manage the business of religion, and the business of this world (which two take up most of our time), so that both may turn to a good account, and neither our sabbath days nor our week-days may be lost, we shall have reason to say, We have learned two good lessons.

### Verses 1-3

Solomon's design, in driving us off from the world, by showing us its vanity, is to drive us to God and to our duty, that we may not walk in the way of the world, but by religious rules, nor depend upon the wealth of the world, but on religious advantages; and therefore,

I. He here sends us to *the house of God*, to the place of public worship, to the temple, which he himself had built at a vast expense. When he reflected with regret on all his other works (ch. 2:4), he did not repent of that, but reflected on it with pleasure, yet mentions it not, lest he should seem to reflect on it with pride; but he here sends those to it that would know more of the vanity of the world and would find that happiness which is in vain sought for in the creature. David, when he was perplexed, *went into the sanctuary of God*, Ps. 73:17. Let our disappointments in the creature turn our eyes to the Creator; let us have recourse to the word of God's grace and consult that, to the throne of his grace and solicit that. In the word and prayer there is a balm for every wound.

II. He charges us to behave ourselves well there, that we may not miss of our end in coming thither. Religious exercises are not vain things, but, if we mismanage them, they become vain to us. And therefore,

1. We must address ourselves to them with all possible seriousness and care: "*Keep thy foot*, not keep it back from the house of God (as Prov. 25:17), nor go slowly thither, as one unwilling to draw nigh to God, but *look well to thy goings, ponder the path of thy feet*, lest thou take a false step. Address thyself to the worship of God with a solemn pause, and take time to compose thyself for it, not going about it with precipitation, which is called *hasting with the feet*, Prov. 19:2. Keep thy thoughts from roving and wandering from the work; keep thy affections from running out towards wrong objects, for in the business of God's house there is work enough for the whole man, and all too little to be employed." Some think it alludes to the charge given to Moses and Joshua to *put off their shoes* (Ex. 3:5, Jos. 5:15,) in token of subjection and reverence. *Keep thy feet* clean, Ex. 30:19.

2. We must take heed that the sacrifice we bring be not *the sacrifice of fools* (of wicked men), for they are fools and their *sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord*, Prov. 15:8), that we bring not *the torn, and the lame, and the sick for sacrifice*, for we are plainly told that it will not be accepted, and therefore it is folly to bring it,—that we rest not in the sign and ceremony, and the outside of the performance, without regarding the sense and meaning of it, for that is the *sacrifice of fools*. Bodily exercise, if that be all, is a jest; none but fools will think thus to please him who is a Spirit and requires the heart, and they will see their folly when they find what a great deal of pains they have taken to no purpose for want of sincerity. They are *fools*, for they *consider not that they do evil*; they think they are doing God and themselves good service when really they are putting a great affront upon God and a great cheat upon their own souls by their hypocritical devotions. Men may be doing evil even when they profess to be doing good, and even when they do not know it, when they do not consider it. *They know not but to do evil*, so some read it. Wicked minds cannot choose but sin, even in the acts of devotion. Or, They *consider not that they do evil*; they act at a venture, right or wrong, pleasing to God or not, it is all one to them.

3. That we may not bring *the sacrifice of fools*, we must come to God's house with hearts disposed to know and do our duty. We must be *ready to hear*, that is, (1.) We must diligently *attend* to the word of God read and preached. "*Be swift to hear* the exposition which the priests give of the sacrifices, declaring the intent and meaning of them, and do not think it enough to gaze upon what they do, for it must be *a reasonable service*, otherwise it is *the sacrifice of fools*." (2.) We must resolve to comply with the will of God as it is made known to us. *Hearing* is often put for *obeying*, and that is it that is *better than sacrifice*, 1 Sa. 15:22; Isa. 1:15, 16. We come in a right frame to holy duties when we come with this upon our heart, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears. Let the word of the Lord come* (said a good man), *and if I had 600 necks I would bow them all to the authority of it*.

4. We must be very cautious and considerate in all our approaches and addresses to God (v. 2): *Be not rash with thy mouth*, in making prayers, or protestations, or promises; *let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God*. Note, (1.) When we are in the *house of God*, in solemn assemblies for religious worship, we are in a special manner before God and in his presence, there where he has promised to meet his people, where his eye is upon us and ours ought to be unto him. (2.) We have something to say, something to utter before God, when we *draw nigh to him* in holy duties; he is one *with whom we have to do*, with whom we have business of vast importance. If we come without an errand, we shall go away without any advantage. (3.)

What we *utter before God* must come from *the heart*, and therefore we must not be *rash with our mouth*, never let our tongue outrun our thoughts in our devotions; the *words of our mouth*, must always be the product of the *meditation of our hearts*. Thoughts are words to God, and words are but wind if they be not copied from the thoughts. Lip-labour, though ever so well laboured, if that be all, is but lost labour in religion, Mt. 15:8, 9. (4.) It is not enough that what we say comes from the heart, but it must come from a composed heart, and not from a sudden heat or passion. As the mouth must not be rash, so the heart must not be hasty; we must not only think, but think twice, before we speak, when we are to speak either from God in preaching or to God in prayer, and not utter any thing indecent and undigested, 1 Co. 14:15.

5. We must be sparing of our words in the presence of God, that is, we must be reverent and deliberate, not talk to God as boldly and carelessly as we do to one another, not speak what comes uppermost, not repeat things over and over, as we do to one another, that what we say may be understood and remembered and may make impression; no, when we speak to God we must consider, (1.) That between him and us there is an infinite distance: *God is in heaven*, where he reigns in glory over us and all the children of men, where he is attended with an innumerable company of holy angels and is *far exalted above all our blessing and praise*. *We are on earth*, the footstool of his throne; we are mean and vile, unlike God, and utterly unworthy to receive any favour from him or to have any communion with him. Therefore we must be very grave, humble, and serious, and be reverent in speaking to him, as we are when we speak to a great man that is much our superior; and, in token of this, *let our words be few*, that they may be *well chosen*, Job 9:14. This does not condemn all long prayers; were they not good, the Pharisees would not have used them for a pretence; Christ prayed all night; and we are directed to *continue in prayer*. But it condemns careless heartless praying, *vain repetitions* (Mt. 6:7), repeating *Pater-nosters* by tale. Let us speak to God, and of him, in his own words, words which the scripture teaches; and let our words, words of our own invention, be few, lest, not speaking by rule, we speak amiss. (2.) That the multiplying of words in our devotions will make them *the sacrifices of fools*, v. 3. As confused dreams, frightful and perplexed, and such as disturb the sleep, are an evidence of a hurry of business which fills our head, so many words and hasty ones, used in prayer, are an evidence of folly reigning in the heart, ignorance of and unacquaintedness with both God and ourselves, low thoughts of God, and careless thoughts of our own souls. Even in common conversation *a fool is known by the multitude of words*; those that know least talk most (ch. 10:11), particularly in devotion; there, no doubt, *a prating fool shall fall* (Prov. 10:8, 10), shall fall short of acceptance. Those are fools indeed who think they *shall be heard*, in prayer, *for their much speaking*.

#### **Verses 4-8**

Four things we are exhorted to in these verses:—

I. To be conscientious in paying our vows.

1. A vow is a bond upon the soul (Num. 30:2), by which we solemnly oblige ourselves, not only, in general, to do that which we are already bound to do, but, in some particular instances, to do that to do which we were not under any antecedent obligation, whether it respects honouring God or serving the interests of his kingdom among men. When, under the sense of some affliction (Ps. 66:14), or in the pursuit of some mercy (1 Sa. 1:11), thou hast vowed such a vow as this *unto God*, know

that *thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord and thou canst not go back*; therefore, (1.) Pay it; perform what thou hast promised; bring to God what thou hast dedicated and devoted to him: *Pay that which thou hast vowed*; pay it in full and *keep not back any part of the price*; pay it in kind, do not *alter it or change it*, so the law was, Lev. 27:10. Have we vowed to *give our own selves unto the Lord*? Let us then be as good as our word, act in his service, to his glory, and not sacrilegiously alienate ourselves. (2.) *Defer not to pay it*. If it be in the power of thy hands to pay it to-day, leave it not till to-morrow; do not *beg a day*, nor put it off to a more convenient season. By delay the sense of the obligation slackens and cools, and is in danger of wearing off; we thereby discover a loathness and backwardness to perform our vow; and *qui non est hodie cras minus aptus erit—he who is not inclined to-day will be averse to-morrow*. The longer it is put off the more difficult it will be to bring ourselves to it; death may not only prevent the payment, but fetch thee to judgment, under the guilt of a broken vow, Ps. 76:11. 2. Two reasons are here given why we should speedily and cheerfully pay our vows:—(1.) Because otherwise we affront God; we play the fool with him, as if we designed to put a trick upon him; and *God has no pleasure in fools*. More is implied than is expressed; the meaning is, He greatly abhors such fools and such foolish dealings. *Has he need of fools*? No; *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*, but will surely and severely reckon with those that thus play fast and loose with him. (2.) Because otherwise we wrong ourselves, we lose the benefit of the making of the *vow*, nay, we incur the penalty for the breach of it; so that it would have been better a great deal *not to have vowed*, more safe and more to our advantage, than to *vow and not to pay*. Not to have *vowed* would have been but an omission, but to *vow and not pay* incurs the guilt of treachery and perjury; it is *lying to God*, Acts 5:4.

II. To be cautious in making our vows. This is necessary in order to our being conscientious in performing them, v. 6. 1. We must take heed that we never vow anything that is sinful, or that may be an occasion of sin, for such a vow is ill-made and must be broken. *Suffer not thy mouth*, by such a vow, *to cause thy flesh to sin*, as Herod's rash promise caused him to cut off the head of John the Baptist. 2. We must not vow that which, through the frailty of the flesh, we have reason to fear we shall not be able to perform, as those that vow a single life and yet know not how to keep their vow. Hereby, (1.) They shame themselves; for they are forced to *say before the angel, It was an error*, that either they did not mean or did not consider what they said; and, take it which way you will, it is bad enough. "When thou hast made a *vow*, do not seek to evade it, nor find excuses to get clear of the obligation of it; *say not before the priest*, who is called the *angel or messenger of the Lord of hosts*, that, upon second thoughts, thou hast changed thy mind, and desirest to be absolved from the obligation of thy vow; but stick to it, and do not seek a hole to creep out at." Some by *the angel* understand the guardian angel which they suppose to attend every man and to inspect what he does. Others understand it of Christ, *the Angel of the covenant*, who is present with his people in their assemblies, who searches the heart, and cannot be imposed upon; *provoke him not, for God's name is in him*, and he is represented as strict and jealous, Ex. 23:20, 21. (2.) They expose themselves to the wrath of God, for he is *angry at the voice of those that thus lie unto him with their mouth and flatter him with their tongue*, and is displeased at their dissimulation, and *destroys the works of their hands*, that is, blasts their enterprises, and defeats those purposes which, when they made these vows, they were seeking to God for the success of. If we treacherously cancel the words of our mouths, and

revoke our vows, God will justly overthrow our projects, and walk contrary, and at all adventures, with those that thus walk contrary, and at all adventures with him. It is *a snare to a man, after vows, to make enquiry*.

III. To keep up the fear of God, v. 7. Many, of old, pretended to know the mind of God by *dreams*, and were so full of them that they almost made God's people forget his name by their *dreams* (Jer. 23:25, 26); and many now perplex themselves with their frightful or odd dreams, or with other people's dreams, as if they foreboded this or the other disaster. Those that heed dreams shall have a multitude of them to fill their heads with; but in them all *there are divers vanities*, as there are in many words, and the more if we regard them. "They are but like the idle impertinent chat of children and fools, and therefore never heed them; forget them; instead of repeating them lay no stress upon them, draw no disquieting conclusions from them, but *fear thou God*; have an eye to his sovereign dominion, set him before thee, keep thyself in his love, and be afraid of offending him, and then thou wilt not disturb thyself with foolish dreams." The way not to be dismayed at the signs of heaven, nor afraid *of the idols of the heathen*, is to *fear God as King of nations*, Jer. 10:2, 5, 7.

IV. With that to keep down the fear of man, v. 8. "Set God before thee, and then, if *thou seest the oppression of the poor*, thou wilt not *marvel at the matter*, nor find fault with divine Providence, nor think the worse of the institution of magistracy, when thou seest the ends of it thus perverted, nor of religion, when thou seest it will not secure men from suffering wrong." Observe here, 1. A melancholy sight on earth, and such as cannot but trouble every good man that has a sense of justice and a concern for mankind, to see *the oppression of the poor* because they are poor and cannot defend themselves, and the *violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province*, oppression under colour of law and backed with power. The kingdom in general may have a good government, and yet it may so happen that a particular province may be committed to a bad man, by whose mal-administration justice may be perverted; so hard it is for the wisest of kings, in giving preferments, to be sure of their men; they can but redress the grievance when it appears. 2. A comfortable sight in heaven. When things look thus dismal we may satisfy ourselves with this, (1.) That, though oppressors be *high*, God is *above them*, and in that very thing wherein *they deal proudly*, Ex. 18:11. God is *higher than the highest* of creatures, than the highest of princes, than the king that is *higher than Agag* (Num. 24:7), than the highest angels, the *thrones and dominions* of the upper world. God is the *Most High over all the earth*, and his *glory is above the heavens*; before him princes are worms, the brightest but glow-worms. (2.) That, though oppressors be secure, God has his eye upon them, takes notice of, and will reckon for, all their violent perverting of judgment; *he regards*, not only sees it but observes it, and keeps it on record, to be called over again; his *eyes are upon their ways*. See Job 24:23. (3.) That there is a world of angels, for there are *higher than they*, who are employed by the divine justice for protecting the injured and punishing the injurious. Sennacherib valued himself highly upon his potent army, but one angel proved too hard for him and all his forces. Some, by those *that are higher than they* understand the great council of the nation, the presidents to whom the *princes of the provinces are accountable* (Dan. 6:2), the senate that receive complaints against the proconsuls, the courts above to which appeals are made from the inferior courts, which are necessary to the good government of a kingdom. Let it be a check to oppressors that perhaps their superiors on earth may call them to an account; however, God the Supreme in heaven will.

## Verses 9-17

Solomon had shown the vanity of pleasure, gaiety, and fine works, of honour, power, and royal dignity; and there is many a covetous worldling that will agree with him, and speak as slightly as he does of these things; but money, he thinks, is a substantial thing, and if he can but have enough of that he is happy. This is the mistake which Solomon attacks, and attempts to rectify, in these verses; he shows that there is as much vanity in great riches, and the *lust of the eye* about them, as there is in the *lusts of the flesh* and the *pride of life*, and a man can make himself no more happy by hoarding an estate than by spending it.

I. He grants that the products of the earth, for the support and comfort of human life, are valuable things (v. 9): *The profit of the earth is for all*. Man's body, being made of the earth, thence has its maintenance (Job 28:5); and that it has so, and that a *barren land* is not *made his dwelling* (as he has deserved for being rebellious, Ps. 68:6), is an instance of God's great bounty to him. There is *profit to be got out of the earth*, and it is *for all*; all need it; it is appointed for all; there is enough for all. It is not only for all men, but for all the inferior creatures; the same ground brings *grass for the cattle* that brings *herbs for the service of men*. Israel had *bread from heaven, angels' food*, but (which is a humbling consideration) the earth is our storehouse and the beasts are fellow-commoners with us. *The king himself is served of the field*, and would be ill served, would be quite starved, without its products. This puts a great honour upon the husbandman's calling, that it is the most necessary of all to the support of man's life. The many have the benefit of it; the mighty cannot live without it; it is *for all*; it is for the *king himself*. Those that have an abundance of the fruits of the earth must remember *they are for all*, and therefore must look upon themselves but as stewards of their abundance, out of which they must give to those that need. Dainty meats and soft clothing are only *for some*, but the *fruit of the earth is for all*. And even those that *suck the abundance of the seas* (Deu. 33:19) cannot be without the fruit of the earth, while those that have a competency of the *fruit of the earth* may despise the *abundance of the seas*.

II. He maintains that the riches that are more than these, that are for hoarding, not for use, are *vain things*, and will not make a man easy or happy. That which our Saviour has said (Lu. 12:15), *that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses*, is what Solomon here undertakes to prove by various arguments.

1. The more men have the more they would have, v. 10. A man may have but a little silver and be satisfied with it, may know when he has enough and covet no more. *Godliness, with contentment, is great gain*. *I have enough*, says Jacob; *I have all, and abound*, says St. Paul: but, (1.) He that *loves silver*, and sets his heart upon it, will never think he has enough, but *enlarges his desire as hell* (Hab. 2:5), *lays house to house and field to field* (Isa. 5:8), and, like *the daughters of the horse-leech, still cries, Give, give*. Natural desires are at rest when that which is desired is obtained, but corrupt desires are insatiable. Nature is content with little, grace with less, but lust with nothing. (2.) He that has silver in abundance, and has it increasing ever so fast upon him, yet does not find that it yields any solid satisfaction to his soul. There are bodily desires which silver itself will not satisfy; if a man be hungry, ingots of silver will do no more to satisfy his hunger than clods of clay. Much less will worldly abundance satisfy spiritual desires; he that has ever so much silver covets more, not only of that, but of something else, something of another nature. Those that make themselves drudges to the world are spending their *labour for that which*

*satisfies not* (Isa. 55:2), which fills the belly, but will never fill the soul, Eze. 7:19.

2. The more men have the more occasion they have for it, and the more they have to do with it, so that it is as broad as it is long: *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them*, v. 11. *The more meat the more mouths*. Does the estate thrive? And does not the family at the same time grow more numerous and the children grow up to need more? The more men have the better house they must keep, the more servants they must employ, the more guests they must entertain, the more they must give to the poor, and the more they will have hanging on them, for where *the carcase is the eagles will be*. What we have more than food and raiment we have *for others*; and then *what good is there to the owners themselves*, but the pleasure of *beholding it with their eyes*? And a poor pleasure it is. An empty speculation is all the difference between the owners and the sharers; the owner sees that as his own which those about him enjoy as much of the real benefit of as he; only he has the satisfaction of doing good to others, which indeed is a satisfaction to one who believes what Christ said, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive*; but to a covetous man, who thinks all lost that goes beside himself, it is a constant vexation to see others eat of his increase.

3. The more men have the more care they have about it, which perplexes them and disturbs their repose, v. 12. Refreshing sleep is as much the support and comfort of this life as food is. Now, (1.) Those commonly sleep best that work hard and have but what they work for: *The sleep of the labouring man is sweet*, not only because he has tired himself with his labour, which makes his sleep the more welcome to him and makes him sleep soundly, but because he has little to fill his head with care about and so break his sleep. His sleep is sweet, though he eat but little and have but little to eat, for his weariness rocks him asleep; and, though he eat much, yet he can sleep well, for his labour gets him a good digestion. The sleep of the diligent Christian, and his long sleep, is sweet; for, having spent himself and his time in the service of God, he can cheerfully return to God and repose in him as his rest. (2.) Those that have every thing else often fail to secure a good night's sleep. Either their eyes are held waking or their sleeps are unquiet and do not refresh them; and it is their abundance that breaks their sleep and disturbs it, both the abundance of their care (as the rich man's who, when his ground brought forth plentifully, thought within himself, *What shall I do?* Lu. 12:17) and the abundance of what they eat and drink which overcharges the heart, makes them sick, and so hinders their repose. Ahasuerus, after a banquet of wine, could not sleep; and perhaps consciousness of guilt, both in getting and using what they have, breaks their sleep as much as any thing. But *God gives his beloved sleep*.

4. The more men have the more danger they are in both of doing mischief and of having mischief done them (v. 13): *There is an evil, a sore evil*, which Solomon himself had *seen under the sun*, in this lower world, this theatre of sin and woe—*riches left for the owners thereof* (who have been industrious to hoard them and keep them safely) *to their hurt*; they would have been better without them. (1.) Their riches *do them hurt*, make them proud, secure, and in love with the world, draw away their hearts from God and duty, and make it very difficult for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven, nay, help to shut them out of it. (2.) They *do hurt with their riches*, which not only put them into a capacity of gratifying their own lusts and living luxuriously, but give them an opportunity of oppressing others and dealing hardly with them. (3.) Often they sustain *hurt by their riches*. They would not be envied, would not be robbed, if they were not rich. It is the fat beast that is led first to the

slaughter. A very rich man (as one observes) has sometimes been excepted out of a general pardon, both as to life and estate, merely on account of his vast and overgrown estate; so riches *often take away the life of the owners thereof*, Prov. 1:19.

5. The more men have the more they have to lose, and perhaps they may lose it all, v. 14. Those riches that have been laid up with a great deal of pains, and kept with a great deal of care, *perish by evil travail*, by the very pains and care which they take to secure and increase them. Many a one has ruined his estate by being over-solicitous to advance it and make it more, and has lost all by catching at all. Riches are perishing things, and all our care about them cannot make them otherwise; they *make themselves wings and fly away*. He that thought he should have made his son a gentleman leaves him a beggar; he *begets a son*, and brings him up in the prospect of an estate, but, when he dies, leaves it under a charge of debt as much as it is worth, so that *there is nothing in his hand*. This is a common case; estates that made a great show do not prove what they seemed, but cheat the heir.

6. How much soever men have when they die, they must leave it all behind them (v. 15, 16): *As he came forth of his mother's womb naked, so shall he return*; only as his friends, when he came naked into the world, in pity to him, helped him with swaddling-clothes, so, when he goes out, they help him with grave-clothes, and that is all. See Job 1:21; Ps. 49:17. This is urged as a reason why we should be content with such things as we have, 1 Tim. 6:7. In respect of the body we must go as we came; the dust shall return to the earth as it was. But sad is our case if the soul return as it came, for we were born in sin, and if we die in sin, unsanctified, we had better never have been born; and that seems to be the case of the worldling here spoken of, for he is said to *return in all points as he came*, as sinful, as miserable, and much more so. This is a *sore evil*; he thinks it so whose heart is glued to the world, that he *shall take nothing of his labour which he may carry away in his hand*; his riches will not go with him into another world nor stand him in any stead there. If we labour in religion, the grace and comfort we get by that labour we may carry away in our hearts, and shall be the better for it to eternity; that is meat that endures. But if we labour only for the world, to fill our hands with that, we cannot take that away with us; we are born with our hands griping, but we die with them extended, letting go what we held fast. So that, upon the whole matter, he may well ask, *What profit has he that has laboured for the wind?* Note, Those that labour for the world labour for the wind, for that which has more sound than substance, which is uncertain, and always shifting its point, unsatisfying, and often hurtful, which we cannot hold fast, and which, if we take up with it as our portion, will no more feed us than the *wind*, Hos. 12:1. Men will see that they have *laboured for the wind* when at death they find the profit of their labour is all gone, gone like the wind, they know not whither.

7. Those that have much, if they set their hearts upon it, have not only uncomfortable deaths, but uncomfortable lives too, v. 17. This covetous worldling, that is so bent upon raising an estate, *all his days eats in darkness and much sorrow, and it is his sickness and wrath*; he has not only no pleasure of his estate, nor any enjoyment of it himself, for he *eats the bread of sorrow* (Ps. 127:2), but a great deal of vexation to see others eat of it. His necessary expenses make him sick, make him fret, and he seems as if he were angry that himself and those about him cannot live without meat. As we read the last clause, it intimates how ill this covetous worldling can bear the common and unavoidable calamities of human life. When he is in health he *eats in darkness*, always dull with care and fear about what he has; but, if he be sick, *he has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness*;

he is vexed that his sickness takes him off from his business and hinders him in his pursuits of the world, vexed that all his wealth will not give him any ease or relief, but especially terrified with the apprehensions of death (which his diseases are the harbingers of), of leaving this world and the things of it behind him, which he has set his affections upon, and removing to a world he has made no preparation for. He has not any *sorrow after a godly sort*, does not *sorrow to repentance*, but he has *sorrow and wrath*, is angry at the providence of God, angry at his sickness, angry at all about him, fretful and peevish, which doubles his affliction, which a good man lessens and lightens by patience and joy in his sickness.

### **Verses 18-20**

Solomon, from the vanity of riches hoarded up, here infers that the best course we can take is to use well what we have, to serve God with it, to do good with it, and take the comfort of it to ourselves and our families; this he had pressed before, ch. 2:24; 3:22. Observe, 1. What it is that is here recommended to us, not to indulge the appetites of the flesh, or to take up with present pleasures or profits for our portion, but soberly and moderately to make use of what Providence has allotted for our comfortable passage through this world. We must not starve ourselves through covetousness, because we cannot afford ourselves food convenient, nor through eagerness in our worldly pursuits, nor through excessive care and grief, but *eat and drink* what is fit for us to keep our bodies in good plight for the serving of our souls in God's service. We must not kill ourselves with *labour*, and then leave others *to enjoy the good* of it, but take the comfort of that which our hands have laboured for, and that not now and then, but *all the days of our life which God gives us*. Life is God's gift, and he has appointed us *the number of the days* of our life (Job 14:5); let us therefore spend those days in *serving the Lord our God with joyfulness and gladness of heart*. We must not do the business of our calling as a drudgery, and make ourselves slaves to it, but we must *rejoice in our labour*, not grasp at more business than we can go through without perplexity and disquiet, but take a pleasure in the calling wherein God has put us, and go on in the business of it with cheerfulness. This it to *rejoice in our labour*, whatever it is, as *Zebulun in his going out and Issachar in his tents*. 2. What is urged to recommend it to us. (1.) That *it is good and comely* to do this. It is well, and it looks well. Those that cheerfully use what God has given them thereby honour the giver, answer the intention of the gift, act rationally and generously, do good in the world, and make what they have turn to the best account, and this is both their credit and their comfort; *it is good and comely*; there is duty and decency in it. (2.) That it is all the good we can have out of the things of this world: *It is our portion*, and in doing thus we take our portion, and make the best of bad. This is our part of our worldly possession. God must have his part, the poor theirs, and our families theirs, but this is ours; it is all that falls to our lot out of them. (3.) That a heart to do thus is such a gift of God's grace as crowns all the gifts of his providence. If God has given a man *riches and wealth*, he completes the favour, and makes that a blessing indeed, if withal he *gives him power to eat thereof*, wisdom and grace to take the good of it and to do good with it. If this *is God's gift*, we must *covet it earnestly as the best gift* relating to our enjoyments in this world. (4.) That this is the way to make our own lives easy and to relieve ourselves against the many toils and troubles which our lives on earth are incident to (v. 20): *He shall not much remember the days of his life*, the days of his sorrow and sore travail, his working days, his weeping days. He shall either forget them or remember them as waters that pass away; he shall not much lay to heart his crosses, nor long retain the bitter

relish of them, *because God answers him in the joy of his heart*, balances all the grievances of his labour with the joy of it and recompenses him for it by giving him to *eat the labour of his hands*. If he does not answer all his desires and expectations, in the letter of them, yet he answers them with that which is more than equivalent, *in the joy of his heart*. A cheerful spirit is a great blessing; it makes the yoke of our employments easy and the burden of our afflictions light

## Chapter 6

In this chapter, I. The royal preacher goes on further to show the vanity of worldly wealth, when men place their happiness in it and are eager and inordinate in laying it up. Riches, in the hands of a man that is wise and generous, and good for something, but in the hands of a sordid, sneaking, covetous miser, they are good for nothing. 1. He takes an account of the possessions and enjoyments which such a man may have. He has wealth (v. 2), he has children to inherit it (v. 3), and lives long (v. 3, 6). 2. He describes his folly in not taking the comfort of it; he has no power to eat of it, lets strangers devour it, is never filled with good, and at last has no burial (v. 2, 3). 3. He condemns it as an evil, a common evil, vanity, and a disease (v. 1, 2). 4. He prefers the condition of a still-born child before the condition of such a one (v. 3). The still-born child's infelicity is only negative (v. 4, 5), but that of the covetous worldling is positive; he lives a great while to see himself miserable (v. 6). 5. He shows the vanity of riches as pertaining only to the body, and giving no satisfaction to the mind (v. 7, 8), and of those boundless desires with which covetous people vex themselves (v. 9), which, if they be gratified ever so fully, leave a man but a man still (v. 10). II. He concludes this discourse of the vanity of the creature with this plain inference from the whole, That it is folly to think of making up a happiness for ourselves in the things of this world (v. 11, 12). Our satisfaction must be in another life, not in this.

### Verses 1-6

Solomon had shown, in the close of the foregoing chapter, how good it is to make a comfortable use of the gifts of God's providence; now here he shows the evil of the contrary, having and not using, gathering to lay up for I know not what contingent emergencies to come, not to lay out on the most urgent occasions present. This *is an evil which* Solomon himself saw *under the sun*, v. 1. A great deal of evil there is *under the sun*. There is a world above the sun where there is no evil, yet God *causes his sun to shine upon the evil* as well as upon *the good*, which is an aggravation of the evil. God has lighted up a candle for his servants to work by, but they bury their talent as slothful and unprofitable, and so waste the light and are unworthy of it. Solomon, as a king, inspected the manners of his subjects, and took notice of this evil as a prejudice to the public, who are damaged not only by men's prodigality on the one hand, but by their penuriousness on the other. As it is with the blood in the natural body, so it is with the wealth of the body politic, if, instead of circulating, it stagnates, it will be of ill consequence. Solomon as a preacher observed the evils that were done that he might reprove them and warn people against them. This evil was, in his days, *common*, and yet then there was great plenty of silver and gold, which, one would think, should have made people less fond of riches; the times also were peaceable, nor was there any prospect of trouble, which to some is a temptation to hoard. But no providence will of itself, unless the grace of God work with it, cure the corrupt affection that is in the carnal mind to the world and the things of it; nay, when *riches increase* we are most apt to set our *hearts upon them*. Now concerning this miser observe,

I. The abundant reason he has to serve God with joyfulness and gladness of heart; how well God has done for him.

1. He *has given him riches, wealth, and honour*, v. 2. Note, (1.) *Riches* and *wealth* commonly gain people *honour* among men. Though it be but an image, if it be a *golden* image, *all people, nations, and languages*, will *fall down and worship it*. (2.)

*Riches, wealth, and honour*, are God's gifts, the gifts of his providence, and not given, as his rain and sunshine, alike to all, but to some, and not to others, as God sees fit. (3.) Yet they are given to many that do not make a good use of them, to many to whom God does not give wisdom and grace to take the comfort of them and serve God with them. The gifts of common providence are bestowed on many to whom are denied the gifts of a special grace, without which the gifts of providence often do more hurt than good.

2. *He wants nothing for his soul of all that he desires.* Providence has been so liberal to him that he has as much as *heart could wish*, and *more*, Ps. 73:7. He does not desire grace for his soul, the better part; all he desires is enough to gratify the sensual appetite, and that he has; his *belly is filled with these hidden treasures*, Ps. 17:14.

3. He is supposed to have a numerous family, to *beget a hundred children*, which are the stay and strength of his house and as a *quiver full of arrows* to him, which are the honour and credit of his house, and in whom he has the prospect of having his name built up and having all the immortality this world can give him. *They are full of children* (Ps. 17:14), while many of God's people are written childless and stripped of all.

4. To complete his happiness, he is supposed to *live many years*, or rather many *days*, for our life is to be reckoned rather by days than years: *The days of his years are many*, and so healthful is his constitution, and so slowly does age creep upon him, that they are likely to be many more. Nay, he is supposed to *live a thousand years* (which no man, that we know of, ever did), nay, *a thousand years twice told*, a small part of which time, one would think, were enough to convince men, by their own experience, of the folly both of those that expect to find all good in worldly wealth, and of those that expect to find any good in it but in using it.

II. The little heart he has to use this which God gives him, for the ends and purposes for which it was given him. This is his fault and folly that he *renders not again according to the benefit done unto him*, and *serves not the Lord God* his benefactor, *with joyfulness and gladness of heart, in the abundance of all things*. In the day of prosperity he is not joyful. *Tristis es, et felix?—Art thou happy, yet sad?* See his folly: 1. He cannot find in his heart to take the comfort of what he has himself. He has meat before him; he has wherewith to maintain himself and his family comfortably, but he has *not power to eat thereof*. His sordid niggardly temper will not suffer him to lay it out, no, not upon himself, no, not upon that which is most necessary for himself. He has not power to reason himself out of this absurdity, to conquer his covetous humour. He is weak indeed, who has not power to use what God gives him, for *God gives him not that power*, but withholds it from him, to punish him for his other abuses of his wealth. Because he has not the will to serve God with it, God denies him the power to serve himself with it. 2. He suffers those to prey upon him that he is under no obligation to: *A stranger eateth it*. This is the common fate of misers; they will not trust their own children perhaps, but retainers and hangers-on, that have the art of wheedling, insinuate themselves into them, and find ways of devouring what they have, or getting it to be left to them by their wills. God orders it so that *a stranger eats it*. *Strangers devour his strength*, Hos. 7:9; Prov. 5:10. This may be well called *vanity, and an evil disease*. What we have we have in vain if we do not use it; and that temper of mind is certainly a most wretched distemper which keeps us from using it. Our worst diseases are those that arise from the corruption of our own hearts. 3. He deprives himself of the good that he

might have had of his worldly possessions, not only forfeits it, but robs himself of it and throws it from him: *His soul is not filled with good*, v. 3. He is still unsatisfied and uneasy. His hands are filled with riches, his barns filled, and his bags filled, but *his soul is not filled with good*, no, not with that good, for it is still craving more. Nay (v. 6), *he has not seen good*; he cannot so much as please his eye, for that is still looking further and looking with envy on those that have more. He has not even the sensible good of an estate. Though he looks not beyond the things that are seen, yet he looks not with any true pleasure even on them. 4. *He has no burial*, none agreeable to his rank, no decent burial, but *the burial of an ass*. Through the sordidness of his temper he will not allow himself a fashionable burial, but forbids it, or the strangers that have eaten him up leave him so poor, at last, that he has not wherewithal, or those to whom he leaves what he has have so little esteem for his memory, and are so greedy of what they are to have from him, that they will not be at the charges of burying him handsomely, which his own children, if he had left it to them, would not have grudged him.

III. The preference which the preacher gives to an untimely birth before him: *An untimely birth*, a child that is carried from the womb to the grave, *is better than he*. Better is the fruit that drops from the tree before it is ripe than that which is left to hang on till it is rotten. Job, in his passion, thinks the condition of *an untimely birth* better than his when he was in adversity (Job 3:16); but Solomon here pronounces it better than the condition of a worldling in his greatest prosperity, when the world smiles upon him. 1. He grants the condition of *an untimely birth*, upon many accounts, to be very sad (v. 4, 5): *He comes in with vanity* (for, as to this world, he that is born and dies immediately was born in vain), and he *departs in darkness*; little or no notice is taken of him; being an abortive, he has no *name*, or, if he had, it would soon be forgotten and buried in oblivion; it would *be covered with darkness*, as the body is with the earth. Nay (v. 5), *he has not seen the sun*, but from the darkness of the womb he is hurried immediately to that of the grave, and, which is worse than not being known to any, he has not *known any thing*, and therefore has come short of that which is the greatest pleasure and honour of man. Those that live in wilful ignorance, and know nothing to purpose, are no better than *an untimely birth that has not seen the sun nor known any thing*. 2. Yet he prefers it before that of a covetous miser. *This untimely birth has more rest than the other*, for *this* has some rest, but *the other* has none; *this* has no trouble and disquiet, but *the other* is in perpetual agitation, and has nothing but trouble, trouble of his own making. The shorter the life is the longer the rest; and the fewer the days, and the less we have to do with this troublesome world, the less trouble we know.

'Tis better die a child at four,  
Than live, and die so at fourscore.

The reason he gives why *this has more rest* is because *all go to one place* to rest in, and this is sooner at his rest, v. 6. He that *lives a thousand years* goes to the same place with the child that does not live an hour, ch. 3:20. The grave is the place we shall all meet in. Whatever differences there may be in men's condition in this world, they must all die, are all under the same sentence, and, to outward appearance, their deaths are alike. The grave is to one, as well as another, a land of silence, of darkness, of separation from the living, and a sleeping-place. It is the common rendezvous of rich and poor, honourable and mean, learned and unlearned; the short-lived and long-lived meet in the grave, only one rides post thither, the other goes by a

slower conveyance; the dust of both mingles, and lies undistinguished.

### Verses 7-10

The preacher here further shows the vanity and folly of heaping up worldly wealth and expecting happiness in it.

I. How much soever we toil about the world, and get out of it, we can have for ourselves no more than a maintenance (v. 7): *All the labour of man is for his mouth, which craves it of him* (Prov. 16:26); it is but *food and raiment*; what is more others have, not we; it is all *for the mouth*. *Meats* are but *for the belly and the belly for meats*; there is nothing for the head and heart, nothing to nourish or enrich the soul. A little will serve to sustain us comfortably and a great deal can do no more.

II. Those that have ever so much are still craving; let a man labour ever so much *for his mouth, yet the appetite is not filled*. 1. Natural desires are still returning, still pressing; a man may be feasted to-day and yet hungry to-morrow. 2. Worldly sinful desires are insatiable, ch. 5:10. Wealth to a worldling is like drink to one in a dropsy, which does but increase the thirst. Some read the whole verse thus: *Though all a man's labour fall out to his own mind (ori ejus obveniat—so as to correspond with his views, Juv.), just as himself would have it, yet his desire is not satisfied*, still he has a mind to something more. 3. The desires of the soul find nothing in the wealth of the world to give them any satisfaction. *The soul is not filled*, so the word is. When God gave Israel *their request he sent leanness into their souls*, Ps. 106:15. He was a fool who, when his barns were full, said, *Soul, take thine ease*.

III. A fool may have as much worldly wealth, and may enjoy as much of the pleasure of it, as a wise man; nay, and perhaps not be so sensible of the vexation of it: *What has the wise more than the fool?* v. 8. Perhaps he has not so good an estate, so good a trade, nor such good preferment as the fool has. Nay, suppose them to be equal in their possessions, what can a wise man, a scholar, a wit, a politician, squeeze out of his estate more than needful supplies? and a half-witted man may do this. A fool can fare as well and relish it, can dress as well, and make as good a figure in any public appearance, as a wise man; so that if there were not pleasures and honour peculiar to the mind, which *the wise man has more than the fool*, as to this world they would be upon a level.

IV. Even a poor man, who has business, and is discreet, diligent, and dexterous, in the management of it, may get as comfortably through this world as he that is loaded with an overgrown estate. Consider *what the poor has* less than the rich, if he but *knows to walk before the living*, knows how to conduct himself decently, and do his duty to all, how to get an honest livelihood by his labour, how to spend his time well and improve his opportunities. *What has he?* Why, he is better beloved and more respected among his neighbours, and has a better interest than many a rich man that is griping and haughty. *What has he?* Why he has as much of the comfort of this life, has *food and raiment*, and is *therewith content*, and so is as truly rich as he that has abundance.

V. The enjoyment of what we have cannot but be acknowledged more rational than a greedy grasping at more (v. 9): *Better is the sight of the eyes*, making the best of that which is present, *than the wandering of the desire*, the uneasy walking of the soul after things at a distance, and the affecting of a variety of imaginary satisfactions. He is much happier that is always content, though he has ever so little, than he that is always coveting, though he has ever so much. We cannot say, *Better is the sight of*

*the eyes than the fixing of the desire* upon God, and the resting of the soul in him; it is better to live by faith in things to come than to live by sense, which dwells only upon present things; but *better is the sight of the eyes than the roving of the desire* after the world, and the things of it, than which nothing is more uncertain nor more unsatisfying at the best. *This wandering of the desire is vanity and vexation of spirit.* It is *vanity* at the best; if what is desired, be obtained, it proves not what we promised ourselves from it, but commonly *the wandering desire* is crossed and disappointed, and then it turns to *vexation of spirit.*

VI. Our lot, whatever it is, is that which is appointed us by the counsel of God, which cannot be altered, and it is therefore our wisdom to reconcile ourselves to it and cheerfully to acquiesce in it (v. 10): *That which has been*, or (as some read it) *that which is*, and so likewise that which shall be, *is named already*; it is already determined in the divine foreknowledge, and all our care and pains cannot make it otherwise than as it is fixed. *Jacta est alea—The die is cast.* It is therefore folly to quarrel with that which will be as it is, and wisdom to make a virtue of necessity. We shall have what pleases God, and let that please us.

VII. Whatever we attain to in this world, still we are but men, and the greatest possessions and preferments cannot set us above the common accidents of human life: *That which has been*, and is, that busy animal that makes such a stir and such a noise in the world, *is named already.* He that made him gave him his name, *and it is known that it is man*; that is his name by which he must know himself, and it is a humbling name, Gen. 5:2. *He called their name Adam*; and all theirs have the same character, *red earth.* Though a man could make himself master of all the treasures of kings and provinces, yet he is a man still, mean, mutable, and mortal, and may at any time be involved in the calamities that are *common to men.* It is good for rich and great men to know and consider that they are *but men*, Ps. 9:20. *It is known that they are but men*; let them put what face they will upon it, and, like the king of Tyre, *set their heart as the heart of God*, yet the Egyptians are men, and not gods, and it is known that they are so.

VIII. How far soever our desires wander, and how closely soever our endeavours keep pace with them, we cannot strive with the divine Providence, but must submit to the disposals of it, whether we will or no. If *it is man, he may not contend with him that is mightier than he.* It is presumption to arraign God's proceedings, and to charge him with folly or iniquity; nor is it to any purpose to complain of him, for *he is in one mind and who can turn him?* Elihu pacifies Job with this incontestable principle, *That God is greater than man* (Job 33:12) and therefore *man may not contend with him*, nor resist his judgments, when they come with commission. A man cannot with the greatest riches make his part good against the arrests of sickness or death, but must yield to his fate.

### **Verses 11-12**

Here, 1. Solomon lays down his conclusion which he had undertaken to prove, as that which was fully confirmed by the foregoing discourse: *There be many things that increase vanity*; the life of man is vain, at the best, and there are abundance of accidents that concur to make it more so; even that which pretends to increase the vanity and make it more vexatious. 2. He draws some inferences from it, which serve further to evince the truth of it. (1.) That a man is never the nearer to true happiness for the abundance that he has in this world: *What is man the better* for his wealth and pleasure, his honour and

preferment? What remains to man? What residuum has he, what overplus, what real advantage, when he comes to balance his accounts? Nothing that will do him any good or turn to account. (2.) That we do not know what to wish for, because that which we promise ourselves most satisfaction in often proves most vexatious to us: *Who knows what is good for a man in this life*, where every thing is vanity, and any thing, even that which we most covet, may prove a calamity to us? Thoughtful people are in care to do every thing for the best, if they knew it; but as it is an instance of the corruption of our hearts that we are apt to desire that as good for us which is really hurtful, as children that cry for knives to cut their fingers with, so is it an instance of the vanity of this world that what, according to all probable conjectures, seems to be for the best, often proves otherwise; such is our shortsightedness concerning the issues and events of things, and such broken reeds are all our creature-confidences. We know not how to advise others for the best, nor how to act ourselves, because that which we apprehend likely to be for our welfare may become a trap. (3.) That therefore our life upon earth is what we have no reason to take any great complacency in, or to be confident of the continuance of. It is to be reckoned by *days*; it is but a *vain life*, and we spend it *as a shadow*, so little is there in it substantial, so fleeting, so uncertain, so transitory is it, and so little in it to be fond of or to be depended on. If all the comforts of life be vanity, life itself can have no great reality in it to constitute a happiness for us. (4.) That our expectations from this world are as uncertain and deceitful as our enjoyments are. Since every thing is vanity, *Who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?* He can no more please himself with the hopes of *what shall be after him*, to his children and family, than with the relish of what is with him, since he can neither foresee himself, nor can any one else foretel to him, *what shall be after him*. Nor shall he have any intelligence sent him of it when he is gone. *His sons come to honour, and he knows it not*. So that, look which way we will, *Vanity of vanity, all is vanity*.

## Chapter 7

Solomon had given many proofs and instances of the vanity of this world and the things of it; now, in this chapter, I. He recommends to us some good means proper to be used for the redress of these grievances and the arming of ourselves against the mischief we are in danger of from them, that we may make the best of the bad, as 1. Care of our reputation (v. 1). 2. Seriousness (v. 2-6). 3. Calmness of spirit (v. 7-10). 4. Prudence in the management of all our affairs (v. 11, 12). 5. Submission to the will of God in all events, accommodating ourselves to every condition (v. 13-15). 6. A conscientious avoiding of all dangerous extremes (v. 16-18). 7. Mildness and tenderness towards those that have been injurious to us (v. 19-22). In short, the best way to save ourselves from the vexation which the vanity of the world creates us is to keep our temper and to maintain a strict government of our passions. II. He laments his own iniquity, as that which was more vexatious than any of these vanities, that mystery of iniquity, the having of many wives, by which he was drawn away from God and his duty (v. 23-29).

### Verses 1-6

In these verses Solomon lays down some great truths which seem paradoxes to the unthinking part, that is, the far greatest part, of mankind.

I. That the honour of virtue is really more valuable and desirable than all the wealth and pleasure in this world (v. 1): *A good name is before good ointment* (so it may be read); it is preferable to it, and will be rather chosen by all that are wise. *Good ointment* is here put for all the profits of the earth (among the products of which oil was reckoned one of the most valuable), for all the delights of sense (for *ointment and perfume* which *rejoice the heart*, and it is called *the oil of gladness*), nay, and for the highest titles of honour with which men are dignified, for kings are anointed. *A good name is better than all riches* (Prov. 21:1), that is, a name for wisdom and goodness with those that are wise and good—*the memory of the just*; this is a good that will bring a more grateful pleasure to the mind, will give a man a larger opportunity of usefulness, and will go further, and last longer, than the most *precious box of ointment*; for Christ paid Mary for her ointment with a *good name*, a name in the gospels (Mt. 26:13), and we are sure he always pays with advantage.

II. That, all things considered, our going out of the world is a great kindness to us than our coming into the world was: *The day of death* is preferable to the *birth-day*; though, as to others, there was joy *when a child was born into the world*, and where there is death there is lamentation, yet, as to ourselves, if we have lived so as to merit a *good name, the day of our death*, which will put a period to our cares, and toils, and sorrows, and remove us to rest, and joy, and eternal satisfaction, *is better than the day of our birth*, which ushered us into a world of so much sin and trouble, vanity and vexation. We were born to uncertainty, but a good man does not die at uncertainty. *The day of our birth* clogged our souls with the burden of the flesh, but *the day of our death* will set them at liberty from that burden.

III. That it will do us more good to go to a funeral than to go to a festival (v. 2): *It is better to go to the house of mourning*, and there *weep with those that weep, than to go to the house of feasting*, to a wedding, or a wake, there to *rejoice with those that do*

*rejoice*. It will do us more good, and make better impressions upon us. We may lawfully go to both, as there is occasion. Our Saviour both feasted at the wedding of his friend in Cana and wept at the grave of his friend in Bethany; and we may possibly glorify God, and do good, and get good, in the house of feasting; but, considering how apt we are to be vain and frothy, proud and secure, and indulgent of the flesh, *it is better* for us *to go to the house of mourning*, not to see the pomp of the funeral, but to share in the sorrow of it, and to learn good lessons, both from the dead, who is going thence to his long home, and from the mourners, who go about the streets.

1. The uses to be gathered from *the house of mourning* are, (1.) By way of information: *That is the end of all men*. *It is the end of man* as to this world, a final period to his state here; he shall return no more to his house. *It is the end of all men*; all have sinned and therefore *death passes upon all*. We must thus be left by our friends, as the mourners are, and thus leave, as the dead do. What is the lot of others will be ours; the cup is going round, and it will come to our turn to pledge it shortly. (2.) By way of admonition: *The living will lay it to his heart*. Will they? It were well if they would. Those that are spiritually alive *will lay it to heart*, and, as for all the survivors, one would think they should; it is their own fault if they do not, for nothing is more easy and natural than by the death of others to be put in mind of our own. Some perhaps *will lay that to heart*, and *consider their latter end*, who would not lay a good sermon to heart.

2. For the further proof of this (v. 4) he makes it the character, (1.) Of a wise man that his *heart is in the house of mourning*; he is much conversant with mournful subjects, and this is both an evidence and a furtherance of his wisdom. *The house of mourning* is the wise man's school, where he has learned many a good lesson, and there, where he is serious, he is in his element. When he *is in the house of mourning* his *heart is there* to improve the spectacles of mortality that are presented to him; nay, when he is in *the house of feasting*, his *heart is in the house of mourning*, by way of sympathy with those that are in sorrow. (2.) It is the character of a fool that his *heart is in the house of mirth*; his heart is all upon it to be merry and jovial; his whole delight is in sport and gaiety, in merry stories, merry songs, and merry company, merry days and merry nights. If he be at any time in *the house of mourning*, he is under a restraint; his heart at the same time *is in the house of mirth*; this is his folly, and helps to make him more and more foolish.

IV. That gravity and seriousness better become us, and are better for us, than mirth and jollity, v. 3. The common proverb says, "An ounce of mirth is worth a pound of sorrow;" but the preacher teaches us a contrary lesson: *Sorrow is better than laughter*, more agreeable to our present state, where we are daily sinning and suffering ourselves, more or less, and daily seeing the sins and sufferings of others. While we are in a vale of tears, we should conform to the temper of the climate. It is also more for our advantage; *for, by the sadness* that appears in *the countenance, the heart is often made better*. Note, 1. That is best for us which is best for our souls, by which *the heart is made better*, though it be displeasing to sense. 2. Sadness is often a happy means of seriousness, and that affliction which is impairing to the health, estate, and family, may be improving to the mind, and make such impressions upon that as may alter its temper very much for the better, may make it humble and meek, loose from the world, penitent for sin, and careful of duty. *Vexatio dat intellectum—Vexation sharpens the intellect. Periissem nisi periissem—I should have perished if I had not been made wretched*. It will follow, on the contrary, that by the mirth and

frolicsomeness of the countenance the heart is made worse, more vain, carnal, sensual, and secure, more in love with the world and more estranged from God and spiritual things (Job 21:12, 14), till it become utterly unconcerned in *the afflictions of Joseph*, as those Amos 6:5, 6, and *the king and Haman*, Esth. 3:15.

V. That it is much better for us to have our corruptions mortified by the *rebuke of the wise* than to have them gratified by *the song of fools*, v. 5. Many that would be very well pleased to hear the information of the wise, and much more to have their commendations and consolations, yet do not care for *hearing their rebukes*, that is, care not for being told of their faults, though ever so wisely; but therein they are no friends to themselves, for *reproofs of instruction are the way of life* (Prov. 6:23), and, though they be not so pleasant as *the song of fools*, they are more wholesome. *To hear*, not only with patience, but with pleasure, *the rebuke of the wise*, is a sign and means of wisdom; but to be fond of *the song of fools* is a sign that the mind is vain and is the way to make it more so. And what an absurd thing is it for a man to dote so much upon such a transient pleasure as *the laughter of a fool* is, which may fitly be compared to the burning *of thorns under a pot*, which makes a great noise and a great blaze, for a little while, but is gone presently, scatters its ashes, and contributes scarcely any thing to the production of a boiling heat, for that requires a constant fire! *The laughter of a fool* is noisy and flashy, and is not an instance of true joy. *This is also vanity*; it deceives men to their destruction, for *the end of that mirth is heaviness*. Our blessed Saviour has read us our doom: *Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh; woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep*, Lu. 6:21, 25.

### **Verses 7-10**

Solomon had often complained before of the *oppressions* which he saw *under the sun*, which gave occasion for many melancholy speculations and were a great discouragement to virtue and piety. Now here,

I. He grants the temptation to be strong (v. 7): *Surely* it is often too true that *oppression makes a wise man mad*. If a wise man be much and long oppressed, he is very apt to speak and act unlike himself, to lay the reins on the neck of his passions, and break out into indecent complaints against God and man, or to make use of unlawful dishonourable means of relieving himself. *The righteous*, when the *rod of the wicked rests long on their lot*, are in danger of *putting forth their hands to iniquity*, Ps. 125:3. When even wise men have unreasonable hardships put upon them they have much ado to keep their temper and to keep their place. *It destroys the heart of a gift* (so the latter clause may be read); even the generous heart that is ready to give gifts, and a gracious heart that is endowed with many excellent gifts, is destroyed by being oppressed. We should therefore make great allowances to those that are abused and ill-dealt with, and not be severe in our censures of them, though they do not act so discreetly as they should; we know not what we should do if it were our own case.

II. He argues against it. Let us not fret at the power and success of oppressors, nor be envious at them, for, 1. The character of oppressors is very bad, so some understand v. 7. If he that had the reputation of *a wise man* becomes an *oppressor*, he becomes a *madman*; his reason has departed from him; he is no better than a roaring lion and a ranging bear, *and the gifts*, the bribes, he takes, the gains he seems to reap by his oppressions, do but *destroy his heart* and quite extinguish the poor remains of sense and virtue in him, and therefore he is rather to be pitied than envied; let him alone, and he will act so foolishly, and drive so

furiously, that in a little time he will ruin himself. 2. The issue, at length, will be good: *Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof*. By faith see what the end will be, and with patience expect it. When proud men begin to oppress their poor honest neighbours they think their power will bear them out in it; they doubt not but to carry the day, and gain the point. But it will prove better in the end than it seemed at the beginning; their power will be broken, their wealth gotten by oppression will be wasted and gone, they will be humbled and brought down, and reckoned with for their injustice, and oppressed innocency will be both relieved and recompensed. *Better was the end of Moses's treaty with Pharaoh*, that proud oppressor, when Israel was brought forth with triumph, *than the beginning of it*, when the tale of bricks was doubled, and every thing looked discouraging.

III. He arms us against it with some necessary directions. If we would not be driven mad by oppression, but preserve the possession of our own souls,

1. We must be clothed with humility; *for the proud in spirit* are those that cannot bear to be trampled upon, but grow outrageous, and fret themselves, when they are hardly bested. That will break a proud man's heart, which will not break a humble man's sleep. Mortify pride, therefore, and a lowly spirit will easily be reconciled to a low condition.

2. We must put on patience, *bearing* patience, to submit to the will of God in the affliction, and *waiting* patience, to expect the issue in God's due time. *The patient in spirit* are here opposed to *the proud in spirit*, for where there is humility there will be patience. Those will be thankful for any thing who own they deserve nothing at God's hand, *and the patient* are said to be *better than the proud*; they are more easy to themselves, more acceptable to others, and more likely to see a good issue of their troubles.

3. We must govern our passion with wisdom and grace (v. 9): *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry*; those that are hasty in their expectations, and cannot brook delays, are apt to be angry if they be not immediately gratified. "Be not angry at proud oppressors, or any that are the instruments of your trouble." (1.) "Be not soon angry, not quick in apprehending an affront and resenting it, nor forward to express your resentments of it." (2.) "Be not long angry;" for though anger may come into the bosom of a wise man, and pass through it as a wayfaring man, it *rests only in the bosom of fools*; there it resides, there it remains, there it has the innermost and uppermost place, there it is hugged as that which is dear, and laid in the bosom, and not easily parted with. He therefore that would approve himself so wise as not to *give place to the devil*, must not *let the sun go down upon his wrath*, Eph. 4:26, 27.

4. We must make the best of that which is (v. 10): "Take it not for granted *that the former days were better than these*, nor enquire *what is the cause* that they were so, for therein *thou dost not enquire wisely*, since thou enquirest into the reason of the thing before thou art sure that the thing itself is true; and, besides, thou art so much a stranger to the times past, and such an incompetent judge even of the present times, that thou canst not expect a satisfactory answer to the enquiry, and therefore *thou dost not enquire wisely*; nay, the supposition is a foolish reflection upon the providence of God in the government of the world." Note, (1.) It is folly to complain of the badness of our own times when we have more reason to complain of the badness of our own hearts (if men's hearts were better, the times would mend) and when we have more reason to be thankful

that they are not worse, but that even in the worst of times we enjoy many mercies, which help to make them not only tolerable, but comfortable. (2.) It is folly to cry up the goodness of former times, so as to derogate from the mercy of God to us in our own times; as if former ages had not the same things to complain of that we have, or if perhaps, in some respects, they had not, yet as if God had been unjust and unkind to us in casting our lot in an iron age, compared with the golden ages that went before us; this arises from nothing but fretfulness and discontent, and an aptness to pick quarrels with God himself. We are not to think there is any universal decay in nature, or degeneracy in morals. God has been always good, and men always bad; and if, in some respects, the times are now worse than they have been, perhaps in other respects they are better.

### **Verses 11-22**

Solomon, in these verses, recommends wisdom to us as the best antidote against those distempers of mind which we are liable to, by reason of the vanity and vexation of spirit that there are in the things of this world. Here are some of the praises and the precepts of wisdom.

I. The praises of wisdom. Many things are here said in its commendation, to engage us to get and retain wisdom. 1. Wisdom is necessary to the right managing and improving of our worldly possessions: *Wisdom is good with an inheritance*, that is, an inheritance is good for little without wisdom. Though a man have a great estate, though it come easily to him, by descent from his ancestors, if he have not wisdom to use it for the end for which he has it, he had better have been without it. Wisdom is not only good for the poor, to make them content and easy, but it is good for the rich too, good with riches to keep a man from getting hurt by them, and to enable a man to do good with them. *Wisdom is good of itself*, and makes a man useful; but, if he have a good estate with it, that will put him into a greater capacity of being useful, and with his wealth he may be more serviceable to his generation than he could have been without it; he will also *make friends to himself*, Lu. 16:9. *Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, yea, better too* (so the margin reads it); it is more our own, more our honour, will make us greater blessings, will remain longer with us, and turn to a better account. 2. It is of great advantage to us throughout the whole course of our passage through this world: *By it there is real profit to those that see the sun*, both to those that have it and to their contemporaries. It is pleasant to *see the sun* (ch. 11:7), but that pleasure is not comparable to the pleasure of wisdom. The light of this world is an advantage to us in doing the business of this world (Jn. 11:9); but to those that have that advantage, unless withal they have wisdom wherewith to manage their business, that advantage is worth little to them. The clearness of the eye of the understanding is of greater use to us than bodily eye-sight. 3. It contributes much more to our safety, and is a shelter to us from the storms of trouble and its scorching heat; *it is a shadow* (so the word is), *as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Wisdom is a defence, and money* (that is, as *money*) *is a defence*. As a rich man makes his wealth, so a wise man makes his wisdom, a *strong city*. *In the shadow of wisdom* (so the words run) *and in the shadow of money* there is safety. He puts wisdom and money together, to confirm what he had said before, that *wisdom is good with an inheritance*. Wisdom is as a wall, and money may serve as a thorn hedge, which protects the field. 4. It is joy and true happiness to a man. This is *the excellency of knowledge*, divine knowledge, not only above money, but above wisdom too, human wisdom, *the wisdom of this world*, that it *gives life to those that have it*. *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom*, and that is life; it prolongs life. Men's wealth

exposes their lives, but their wisdom protects them. Nay, whereas wealth will not lengthen out the natural life, true wisdom will give spiritual life, the earnest of eternal life; so much *better is it to get wisdom than gold*. 5. It will put strength into a man, and be his stay and support (v. 19): *Wisdom strengthens the wise*, strengthens their spirits, and makes them bold and resolute, by keeping them always on sure grounds. It strengthens their interest, and gains them friends and reputation. It strengthens them for their services under their sufferings, and against the attacks that are made upon them, *more than ten mighty men*, great commanders, strengthen *the city*. Those that are truly wise and good are taken under God's protection, and are safer there than if ten of the mightiest men in the city, men of the greatest power and interest, should undertake to secure them, and become their patrons.

II. Some of the precepts of wisdom, that wisdom which will be of so much advantage to us.

1. We must have an eye to God and to his hand in every thing that befalls us (v. 13): *Consider the work of God*. To silence our complaints concerning cross events, let us consider the hand of God in them and not open our mouths against that which is his doing; let us look upon the disposal of our condition and all the circumstances of it as the *work of God*, and consider it as the product of his eternal counsel, which is fulfilled in every thing that befalls us. Consider that every work of God is wise, just, and good, and there is an admirable beauty and harmony in his works, and all will appear at last to have been for the best. Let us therefore give him the glory of all his works concerning us, and study to answer his designs in them. *Consider the work of God* as that which we cannot make any alteration of. *Who can make that straight which he has made crooked?* Who can change the nature of things from what is settled by the God of nature? If he speak trouble, who can make peace? And, if he hedge up the way with thorns, who can get forward? If desolating judgments go forth with commission, who can put a stop to them? Since therefore we cannot mend God's work, we ought to make the best of it.

2. We must accommodate ourselves to the various dispensations of Providence that respect us, and do the work and duty of the day in its day, v. 14. Observe, (1.) How the appointments and events of Providence are counterchanged. In this world, at the same time, some are in prosperity, others are in adversity; the same persons at one time are in great prosperity, at another time in great adversity; nay, one event prosperous, and another grievous, may occur to the same person at the same time. Both come from the hand of God; *out of his mouth both evil and good proceed* (Isa. 14:7), and *he has set the one over against the other*, so that there is a very short and easy passage between them, and they are a foil to each other. Day and night, summer and winter, are set *the one over against the other*, that in prosperity we may rejoice *as though we rejoiced not*, and in adversity may weep *as though we wept not*, for we may plainly see the one from the other and quickly exchange the one for the other; and it is *to the end that man may find nothing after him*, that he may not be at any certainty concerning future events or the continuance of the present scene, but may live in a dependence upon Providence and be ready for whatever happens. Or that man may find nothing in the work of God which he can pretend to amend. (2.) How we must comply with the will of God in events of both kinds. Our religion, in general, must be the same in all conditions, but the particular instances and exercises of it must vary, as our outward condition does, that we may *walk after the Lord*. [1.] *In a day of prosperity* (and it is but a day), we must *be joyful*, be in good, be doing good, and getting good, maintain a holy cheerfulness, and *serve the Lord with gladness of heart in the*

*abundance of all things.* "When the world smiles, *rejoice in God*, and praise him, and let *the joy of the Lord be thy strength.*" [2.] *In a day of adversity* (and that is but a day too) *consider.* Times of affliction are proper times for consideration, then God calls to *consider* (Hag. 1:5), then, if ever, we are disposed to it, and no good will be gotten by the affliction without it. We cannot answer God's end in afflicting us unless we consider why and wherefore he contends with us. And consideration is necessary also to our comfort and support under our afflictions.

3. We must not be offended at the greatest prosperity of wicked people, nor at the saddest calamities that may befall the godly in this life, v. 15. Wisdom will teach us how to construe those dark chapters of Providence so as to reconcile them with the wisdom, holiness, goodness, and faithfulness of God. We must not think it strange; Solomon tells us there were instances of this kind in his time: "*All things have I seen in the days of my vanity*; I have taken notice of all that passed, and this has been as surprising and perplexing to me as any thing." Observe, Though Solomon was so wise and great a man, yet he calls the days of his life *the days of his vanity*, for the best days on earth are so, in comparison with the days of eternity. Or perhaps he refers to the days of his apostasy from God (those were indeed the days of his vanity) and reflects upon this as one thing that tempted him to infidelity, or at least to indifferency in religion, that he saw *just men perishing in their righteousness*, that the greatest piety would not secure men from the greatest afflictions by the hand of God, nay, and sometimes did expose men to the greatest injuries from the hands of wicked and unreasonable men. Naboth perished in his righteousness, and Abel long before. He had also seen wicked men prolonging their lives in their wickedness; they *live, become old, yea, are mighty in power* (Job 21:7), yea, and by their fraud and violence they screen themselves from the sword of justice. "Now, in this, consider the work of God, and let it not be a stumbling-block to thee." The calamities of the righteous are preparing them for their future blessedness, and the wicked, while their days are prolonged, are but ripening for ruin. There is a judgment to come, which will rectify this seeming irregularity, to the glory of God and the full satisfaction of all his people, and we must wait with patience till then.

4. Wisdom will be of use both for caution to saints in their way, and for a check to sinners in their way. (1.) As to saints, it will engage them to proceed and persevere in their righteousness, and yet will be an admonition to them to take heed of running into extremes: *A just man may perish in his righteousness*, but let him not, by his own imprudence and rash zeal, pull trouble upon his own head, and then reflect upon Providence as dealing hardly with him. "*Be not righteous overmuch*, v. 16. In the acts of righteousness govern thyself by the rules of prudence, and be not transported, no, not by a zeal for God, into any intemperate heats or passions, or any practices unbecoming thy character or dangerous to thy interests." Note, There may be over-doing in well-doing. Self-denial and mortification of the flesh are good; but if we prejudice our health by them, and unfit ourselves for the service of God, we are *righteous overmuch*. To reprove those that offend is good, but to cast that pearl before swine, who will turn again and rend us, is to be *righteous overmuch*. "*Make not thyself over-wise*. Be not opinionative, and conceited of thy own abilities. Set not up for a dictator, nor pretend to give law to, and give judgment upon, all about thee. Set not up for a critic, to find fault with every thing that is said and done, nor busy thyself in other men's matters, as if thou knewest every thing and couldst do any thing. *Why shouldst thou destroy thyself*, as fools often do by meddling with strife that

belongs not to them? Why shouldst thou provoke authority, and run thyself into the briers, by needless contradictions, and by going out of thy sphere to correct what is amiss? *Be wise as serpents; beware of men.*" (2.) As to sinners, if it cannot prevail with them to forsake their sins, yet it may restrain them from growing very exorbitant. It is true *there is a wicked man that prolongs his life in his wickedness* (v. 15); but let none say that therefore they may safely be as wicked as they will; no, *be not overmuch wicked* (v. 17); do not run to an excess of riot. Many that will not be wrought upon by the fear of God, and a dread of the torments of hell, to avoid all sin, will yet, if they have ever so little consideration, avoid those sins that ruin their health and estate, and expose them to public justice. And Solomon here makes use of these considerations. "*The magistrate bears not the sword in vain, has a quick eye and a heavy hand, and is a terror to evil-doers; therefore be afraid of coming within his reach, be not so foolish as to lay thyself open to the law, why shouldst thou die before thy time?*" Solomon, in these two cautions, had probably a special regard to some of his own subjects that were disaffected to his government and were meditating the revolt which they made immediately after his death. Some, it may be, quarrelled with the sins of their governor, and made them their pretence; to them he says, *Be not righteous overmuch*. Others were weary of the strictness of the government, and the temple-service, and that made them desirous to set up another king; but he frightens both from their seditious practices with the sword of justice, and others likewise from meddling *with those that were given to change*.

5. Wisdom will direct us in the mean between two extremes, and keep us always in the way of our duty, which we shall find a plain and safe way (v. 18): "*It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this, this wisdom, this care, not to run thyself into snares. Yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand; never slacken thy diligence, nor abate thy resolution to maintain a due decorum, and a good government of thyself. Take hold of the bridle by which thy head-strong passions must be held in from hurrying thee into one mischief or other, as the horse and mule that have no understanding; and, having taken hold of it, keep thy hold, and withdraw not thy hand from it, for, if thou do, the liberty that they will take will be as the letting forth of water, and thou wilt not easily recover thy hold again. Be conscientious, and yet be cautious, and to this exercise thyself. Govern thyself steadily by the principles of religion, and thou shalt find that he that fears God shall come forth out of all those straits and difficulties which those run themselves into that cast off that fear.*" *The fear of the Lord* is that wisdom which will serve as a clue to extricate us out of the most intricate labyrinths. *Honesty is the best policy*. Those that truly fear God have but one end to serve, and therefore act steadily. God has likewise promised to direct those that fear him, and to order their steps not only in the right way, but out of every dangerous way, Ps. 37:23, 24.

6. Wisdom will teach us how to conduct ourselves in reference to the sins and offences of others, which commonly contribute more than any thing else to the disturbance of our repose, which contract both guilt and grief.

(1.) Wisdom teaches us not to expect that those we deal with should be faultless; we ourselves are not so, none are so, no, not the best. This *wisdom strengthens the wise* as much as any thing, and arms them against the danger that arises from provocation (v. 19), so that they are not put into any disorder by it. They consider that those they have dealings and conversation with are not incarnate angels, but sinful sons and daughters of Adam: even the best are so, insomuch that *there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not*, v. 20. Solomon had this in his prayer (1 Ki. 8:46), in his proverbs

(Prov. 20:9), and here in his preaching. Note, [1.] It is the character of just men that they *do good*; for the tree is known by its fruits. [2.] The best men, and those that do most good, yet cannot say that they are perfectly free from sin; even those that are sanctified are not sinless. None that live on this side of heaven live without sin. *If we say, We have not sinned, we deceive ourselves.* [3.] We sin even in our doing good; there is something defective, nay, something offensive, in our best performances. That which, for the substance of it, is good, and pleasing to God, is not so well done as it should be, and omissions in duty are sins, as well as omissions of duty. [4.] It is only just men upon earth that are subject thus to sin and infirmity; *the spirits of just men*, when they have got clear of the body, are made *perfect* in holiness (Heb. 12:23), and in heaven they *do good and sin not*.

(2.) Wisdom teaches us not to be quicksighted, or quickscented, in apprehending and resenting affronts, but to wink at many of the injuries that are done us, and act as if we did not see them (v. 21): "*Take no heed to all words that are spoken; set not thy heart to them.* Vex not thyself at men's peevish reflections upon thee, or suspicions of thee, but be *as a deaf man that hears not*, Ps. 38:13, 14. Be not solicitous or inquisitive to know what people say of thee; if they speak well of thee, it will feed thy pride, if ill, it will stir up thy passion. See therefore that thou approve thyself to God and thy own conscience, and then heed not what men say of thee. *Hearkeners*, we say, *seldom hear good of themselves*; if thou heed every word that is spoken, perhaps *thou wilt hear thy own servant curse thee* when he thinks thou dost not hear him; thou wilt be told that he does, and perhaps told falsely, if thou have thy ear open to tale-bearers, Prov. 29:12. Nay, perhaps it is true, and thou mayest stand behind the curtain and hear it thyself, mayest hear thyself not only blamed and despised, but cursed, the worst evil said of thee and wished to thee, and that by a servant, one of the meanest rank, of the objects, nay, by thy own servant, who should be an advocate for thee, and protect thy good name as well as thy other interests. Perhaps it is a servant thou hast been kind to, and yet he requites thee thus ill, and this will vex thee; thou hadst better not have heard it. Perhaps it is a servant thou hast wronged and dealt unjustly with, and, though he dares not tell thee so, he tells others so, and tells God so, and then thy own conscience will join with him in the reproach, which will make it much more uneasy." The good names of the greatest lie much at the mercy even of the meanest. And perhaps there is a great deal more evil said of us than we think there is, and by those from whom we little expected it. But we do not consult our own repose, no, nor our credit, though we pretend to be jealous of it, if we take notice of every word that is spoken diminishingly of us; it is easier to pass by twenty such affronts than to avenge one.

(3.) Wisdom puts us in mind of our own faults (v. 22): "Be not enraged at those that speak ill of thee, or wish ill to thee, *for oftentimes*, in that case, if thou retire into thyself, thy own conscience will tell thee *that thou thyself hast cursed others*, spoken ill of them and wished ill to them, and thou art paid in thy own coin." Note, When any affront or injury is done us it is seasonable to examine our consciences whether we have not done the same, or as bad, to others; and if, upon reflection, we find we have, we must take that occasion to renew our repentance for it, must justify God, and make use of it to qualify our own resentments. If we be truly angry with ourselves, as we ought to be, for backbiting and censuring others, we shall be the less angry with others for backbiting and censuring us. We must show all meekness towards all men, for we ourselves *were sometimes foolish*, Tit. 3:2, 3; Mt. 7:1, 2; James 3:1, 2.

## Verses 23-29

Solomon had hitherto been proving the vanity of the world and its utter insufficiency to make men happy; now here he comes to show the vileness of sin, and its certain tendency to make men miserable; and this, as the former, he proves from his own experience, and it was a dear-bought experience. He is here, more than any where in all this book, putting on the habit of a penitent. He reviews what he had been discoursing of already, and tells us that what he had said was what he knew and was well assured of, and what he resolved to stand by: *All this have I proved by wisdom*, v. 23. Now here,

I. He owns and laments the deficiencies of his wisdom. He had wisdom enough to see the vanity of the world and to experience that that would not make a portion for a soul. But, when he came to enquire further, he found himself at a loss; his eye was too dim, his line was too short, and, though he discovered this, there were many other things which he could not prove by wisdom.

1. His searches were industrious. God had given him a capacity for knowledge above any; he set up with a great stock of wisdom; he had the largest opportunities of improving himself that ever any man had; and, (1.) He resolved, if it were possible, to gain his point: *I said, I will be wise*. He earnestly desired it as highly valuable; he fully designed it as that which he looked upon to be attainable; he determined not to sit down short of it, Prov. 18:1. Many are not wise because they never said they would be so, being indifferent to it; but Solomon set it up for the mark he aimed at. When he made trial of sensual pleasures, he still thought *to acquaint his heart with wisdom* (ch. 2:3), and not to be diverted from the pursuits of that; but perhaps he did not find it so easy a thing as he imagined to keep up his correspondence with wisdom, while he addicted himself so much to his pleasures. However, his will was good; he said, *I will be wise*. And that was not all: (2.) He resolved to spare no pains (v. 25): *"I applied my heart; I and my heart turned every way; I left no stone unturned, no means untried, to compass what I had in view. I set myself to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, to accomplish myself in all useful learning, philosophy, and divinity."* If he had not thus closely applied himself to study, it would have been but a jest for him to say, *I will be wise*, for those that will attain the end must take the right way. Solomon was a man of great quickness, and yet, instead of using that (with many) as an excuse for slothfulness, he pressed it upon himself as an inducement to diligence, and the easier he found it to master a good notion the more intent he would be that he might be master of the more good notions. Those that have the best parts should take the greatest pains, as those that have the largest stock should trade most. He applied himself not only to know what lay on the surface, but to search what lay hidden out of the common view and road; nor did he search a little way, and then give it over because he did not presently find what he searched for, but he *sought it out*, went to the bottom of it; nor did he aim to know things only, but the reasons of things, that he might give an account of them.

2. Yet his success was not answerable or satisfying: *"I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me; I could not compass it. After all, This only I know that I know nothing, and the more I know the more I see there is to be known, and the more sensible I am of my own ignorance. That which is far off, and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?"* He means God himself, his counsels and his works; when he searched into these he presently found himself puzzled and run aground. *He could not order his speech by reason of darkness. It is higher than heaven, what can he do?* Job 11:8. Blessed be God, there is nothing which we have to

do which is not plain and easy; *the word is nigh us* (Prov. 8:9); but there is a great deal which we would wish to know which is *far off, and exceedingly deep*, among the secret things which belong not to us. And probably it is a culpable ignorance and error that Solomon here laments, that his pleasures, and the many amusements of his court, had blinded his eyes and cast a mist before them, so that he could not attain to true wisdom as he designed.

II. He owns and laments the instances of his folly in which he had exceeded, as, in wisdom, he came short. Here is,

1. His enquiry concerning the evil of sin. He *applied his heart to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness*. Observe, (1.) The knowledge of sin is a difficult knowledge, and hard to be attained; Solomon took pains for it. Sin has many disguises with which it palliates itself, as being loth to appear sin, and it is very hard to strip it of these and to see it in its true nature and colours. (2.) It is necessary to our repentance for sin that we be acquainted with the evil of it, as it is necessary to the cure of a disease to know its nature, causes, and malignity. St. Paul *therefore* valued the divine law, because it discovered sin to him, Rom. 7:7. Solomon, who, in the days of his folly, had set his wits on work to invent pleasures and sharpen them, and was ingenious in making provision for the flesh, now that God had opened his eyes is as industrious to find out the aggravations of sin and so to put an edge upon his repentance. Ingenious sinners should be ingenious penitents, and wit and learning, among the other spoils of the *strong man armed*, should be divided by the Lord Jesus. (3.) It well becomes penitents to say the worst they can of sin, for the truth is we can never speak ill enough of it. Solomon here, for his further humiliation, desired to see more, [1.] Of the sinfulness of sin; that is it which he lays the greatest stress upon in this inquiry, to *know the wickedness of folly*, by which perhaps he means his own iniquity, the sin of uncleanness, for that was commonly called *folly in Israel*, Gen. 34:7; Deu. 22:21; Jdg. 20:6; 2 Sa. 13:12. When he indulged himself in it, he made a light matter of it; but now he desires to see the *wickedness* of it, its *great wickedness*, so Joseph speaks of it, Gen. 39:9. Or it may be taken there generally for all sin. Many extenuate their sins with this, They were *folly*; but Solomon sees *wickedness* in those follies, an offence to God and a wrong to conscience. *This is wickedness*, Jer. 4:18; Zec. 5:8. [2.] Of the folly of sin; as there is a wickedness in folly, so there is a folly in wickedness, even foolishness and madness. Wilful sinners are fools and madmen; they act contrary both to right reason and to their true interest.

2. The result of this enquiry.

(1.) He now discovered more than ever of the evil of that great sin which he himself had been guilty of, the *loving of many strange women*, 1 Ki. 11:1. This is that which he here most feelingly laments, and in very pathetic expressions. [1.] He found the remembrance of the sin very grievous. O how heavily did it lie upon his conscience! what an agony was he in upon the thought of it—the wickedness, the foolishness, the madness, that he had been guilty of! *I find it more bitter than death*. As great a terror seized him, in reflection upon it, as if he had been under the arrest of death. Thus do those that have their sins set in order before them by a sound conviction cry out against them; they are bitter as gall, nay, bitter as death, to all true penitents. Uncleanness is a sin that is, in its own nature, more pernicious than death itself. Death may be made honourable and comfortable, but this sin can be no other than shame and pain, Prov. 5:9, 11. [2.] He found the temptation to the sin very dangerous, and that it was extremely difficult, and next to impossible, for those that ventured into the temptation to escape the

sin, and for those that had fallen into the sin to recover themselves by repentance. The heart of the adulterous woman is *snares and nets*; she plays her game to ruin souls with as much art and subtlety as ever any fowler used to take a silly bird. The methods such sinners use are both deceiving and destroying, as snares and nets are. The unwary souls are enticed into them by the bait of pleasure, which they greedily catch at and promise themselves satisfaction in; but they are taken before they are aware, and taken irrecoverably. Her hands are as bands, with which, under colour of fond embraces, she holds those fast that she has seized; they are *held in the cords of their own sin*, Prov. 5:22. Lust gets strength by being gratified and its charms are more prevalent. [3.] He reckoned it a great instance of God's favour to any man if by his grace he has kept him from this sin: *He that pleases God shall escape from her*, shall be preserved either from being tempted to this sin or from being overcome by the temptation. Those that are kept from this sin must acknowledge it is God that keeps them, and not any strength or resolution of their own, must acknowledge it a great mercy; and those that would have grace sufficient for them to arm them against this sin must be careful to please God in every thing, by keeping his ordinances, Lev. 18:30. [4.] He reckoned it a sin that is as sore a punishment of other sins as a man can fall under in this life: *The sinner shall be taken by her*. *First*, Those that allow themselves in other sins, by which their minds are blinded and their consciences debauched, are the more easily drawn to this. *Secondly*, it is just with God to leave them to themselves to fall into it. See Rom. 1:26, 28; Eph. 4:18, 19. Thus does Solomon, as it were, with horror, bless himself from the sin in which he had plunged himself.

(2.) He now discovered more than ever of the general corruption of man's nature. He traces up that stream to the fountain, as his father had done before him, on a like occasion (Ps. 51:5): *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity*. [1.] He endeavoured to find out the number of his actual transgressions (v. 27): *"Behold, this have I found*, that is, this I hoped to find; I thought I could have understood my errors and have brought in a complete list, at least of the heads of them; I thought I could have counted them one by one, and have found out the account." He desired to find them out as a penitent, that he might the more particularly acknowledge them; and, generally, the more particular we are in the confession of sin the more comfort we have in the sense of the pardon; he desired it also as a preacher, that he might the more particularly give warning to others. Note, A sound conviction of one sin will put us upon enquiring into the whole confederacy; and the more we see amiss in ourselves the more diligently we should enquire further into our own faults, that what we see not may be discovered to us, Job 34:32. [2.] He soon found himself at a loss, and perceived that they were innumerable (v. 28): *"Which yet my soul seeks*; I am still counting, and still desirous to find out the account, but I find not, I cannot count them all, nor find out the account of them to perfection. I still make new and amazing discoveries of the desperate wickedness that there is in my own heart," Jer. 17:9, 10. *Who can know it? Who can understand his errors? Who can tell how often he offends?* Ps. 19:12. He finds that if God enters into judgment with him, or he with himself, for all his thoughts, words, and actions, he is *not able to answer for one of a thousand*, Job 9:3. This he illustrates by comparing the corruption of his own heart and life with the corruption of the world, where he scarcely found one good man among a thousand; nay, among all the thousand wives and concubines which he had, he did not find *one good woman*. "Even so," says he, "When I come to recollect and review my own thoughts, words, and actions, and all the passages of my life past, perhaps among those that were manly I might find one good among a thousand, and that was all;

the rest even of those had some corruption or other in them." He found (v. 20) that he had sinned even in doing good. But for those that were effeminate, that passed in the indulgence of his pleasures, they were all naught; in that part of his life there did not appear so much as one of a thousand good. In our hearts and lives there appears little good, at the best, but sometimes none at all. Doubtless this is not intended as a censure of the female sex in general; it is probable that there have been and are more good women than good men (Acts 17:4, 12); he merely alludes to his own sad experience. And perhaps there may be this further in it: he does, in his proverbs, warn us against the snares both of the *evil man* and of the *strange woman* (Prov. 2:12, 16; 4:14; 5:3); now he had observed the ways of the *evil women* to be more deceitful and dangerous than those of the *evil men*, that it was more difficult to discover their frauds and elude their snares, and therefore he compares sin to an adulteress (Prov. 9:13), and perceives he can no more find out the deceitfulness of his own heart than he can that of a strange woman, whose ways are movable, that thou canst not know them. [3.] He therefore runs up all the streams of actual transgression to the fountain of original corruption. The source of all the folly and madness that are in the world is in man's apostasy from God and his degeneracy from his primitive rectitude (v. 20): "*Lo, this only have I found*; when I could not find out the particulars, yet the gross account was manifest enough; it is as clear as the sun that man is corrupted and revolted, and is not as he was made." Observe, *First*, How man was made by the wisdom and goodness of God: *God made man upright; Adam the first man*, so the Chaldee. God made him, and he made him *upright*, such a one as he should be; being made a rational creature, he was, in all respects, such a one as a rational creature should be, *upright*, without any irregularity; one could find no fault in him; he was *upright*, that is, determined to God only, in opposition to the *many inventions* which he afterwards turned aside to. Man, as he came out of God's hands, was (as we may say) a little picture of his Maker, who is *good and upright*. *Secondly*, How he was marred, and in effect unmade, by his own folly and badness: *They have sought out many inventions*—they, our first parents, or the whole race, all in general and every one in particular. *They have sought out great inventions* (so some), inventions to become great as gods (Gen. 3:5), or *the inventions of the great ones* (so some), of the angels that fell, the *Magnates*, or *many inventions*. Man, instead of resting in what God had found for him, was for seeking to better himself, like the prodigal that left his father's house to seek his fortune. Instead of being for one, he was for many; instead of being for God's institutions, he was for his own inventions. The law of his creation would not hold him, but he would be at his own disposal and follow his own sentiments and inclinations. *Vain man would be wise*, wiser than his Maker; he is giddy and unsettled in his pursuits, and therefore has *many inventions*. Those that forsake God wander endlessly. Men's actual transgressions are multiplied. Solomon could not find out how many they are (v. 28); but he found they were *very many*. Many kinds of sins, and those often repeated. *They are more than the hairs on our heads*, Ps. 40:12.

## Chapter 8

Solomon, in this chapter, comes to recommend wisdom to us as the most powerful antidote against both the temptations and vexations that arise from the vanity of the world. Here is, I. The benefit and praise of wisdom (v. 1). II. Some particular instances of wisdom prescribed to us. 1. We must keep in due subjection to the government God has set over us (v. 2-5). 2. We must get ready for sudden evils, and especially for sudden death (v. 6-8). 3. We must arm ourselves against the temptation of an oppressive government and not think it strange (v. 9, 10). The impunity of oppressors makes them more daring (v. 11), but in the issue it will be well with the righteous and ill with the wicked (v. 12, 13), and therefore the present prosperity of the wicked and afflictions of the righteous ought not to be a stumbling-block to us (v. 14). 4. We must cheerfully use the gifts of God's providence (v. 15). 5. We must with an entire satisfaction acquiesce in the will of God, and, not pretending to find the bottom, we must humbly and silently adore the depth of his unsearchable counsels, being assured they are all wise, just, and good (v. 16, 17).

### Verses 1-5

Here is, I. An encomium of *wisdom* (v. 1), that is, of true piety, guided in all its exercises by prudence and discretion. The wise man is the good man, that knows God and glorifies him, knows himself and does well for himself; his wisdom is a great happiness to him, for, 1. It advances him above his neighbours, and makes him more excellent than they: *Who is as the wise man?* Note, Heavenly wisdom will make a man an incomparable man. No man without grace, though he be learned, or noble, or rich, is to be compared with a man that has true grace and is therefore accepted of God. 2. It makes him useful among his neighbours and very serviceable to them: *Who* but the *wise man knows the interpretation of a thing*, that is, understands the times and the events of them, and their critical junctures, so as to direct *what Israel ought to do*, 1 Chr. 12:32. 3. It beautifies a man in the eyes of his friends: *It makes his face to shine*, as Moses's did when he came down from the mount; it puts honour upon a man and a lustre on his whole conversation, makes him to be regarded and taken notice of, and gains him respect (as Job 29:7, etc.); it makes him lovely and amiable, and the darling and blessing of his country. *The strength of his face*, the sourness and severity of his countenance (so some understand the last clause), *shall be changed* by it into that which is sweet and obliging. Even those whose natural temper is rough and morose by *wisdom* are strangely altered; they become mild and gentle, and learn to look pleasant. 4. It emboldens a man against his adversaries, their attempts and their scorn: *The boldness of his face shall be doubled* by wisdom; it will add very much to his courage in maintaining his integrity when he not only has an honest cause to plead, but by his wisdom knows how to manage it and where to find *the interpretation of a thing*. *He shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with his enemy in the gate*.

II. A particular instance of wisdom pressed upon us, and that is subjection to authority, and a dutiful and peaceable perseverance in our allegiance to the government which Providence has set over us. Observe,

1. How the duty of subjects is here described. (1.) We must be observant of the laws. In all those things wherein the civil power is to interpose, whether legislative or judicial, we ought to submit to its order and constitutions: *I counsel thee*; it may as

well be supplied, *I charge thee*, not only as a prince but as a preacher: he might do both; "I recommend it to thee as a piece of wisdom; I say, whatever those say that are given to change, *keep the king's commandment*; wherever the sovereign power is lodged, be subject to it. *Observe the mouth of a king*" (so the phrase is); "say as he says; do as he bids thee; let his word be a law, or rather let the law be his word." Some understand the following clause as a limitation of this obedience: "*Keep the king's commandment*, yet so as to have a *regard to the oath of God*, that is, so as to keep a good conscience and not to violate thy obligations to God, which are prior and superior to thy obligations to the king. *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*, but so as to reserve pure and entire *to God the things that are his*." (2.) We must not be forward to find fault with the public administration, or quarrel with every thing that is not just according to our mind, nor quit our post of service under the government, and throw it up, upon every discontent (v. 3): "*Be not hasty to go out of his sight*, when he is displeased at thee (ch. 10:4), or when thou art displeased at him; fly not off in a passion, nor entertain such jealousies of him as will tempt thee to renounce the court or forsake the kingdom." Solomon's subjects, as soon as his head was laid low, went directly contrary to this rule, when upon the rough answer which Rehoboam gave them, they were *hasty to go out of his sight*, would not take time for second thoughts nor admit proposals of accommodation, but cried, *To your tents, O Israel!* "There may perhaps be a just cause *to go out of his sight*; but *be not hasty* to do it; act with great deliberation." (3.) We must not persist in a fault when it is shown us: "*Stand not in an evil thing*; in any offence thou hast given to thy prince humble thyself, and do not justify thyself, for that will make the offence much more offensive. In any ill design thou hast, upon some discontent, conceived against thy prince, do not proceed in it; but *if thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth*," Prov. 30:32. Note, Though we may by surprise be drawn into an evil thing, yet we must not stand in it, but recede from it as soon as it appears to us to be evil. (4.) We must prudently accommodate ourselves to our opportunities, both for our own relief, if we think ourselves wronged, and for the redress of public grievances: *A wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment* (v. 5); it is the wisdom of subjects, in applying themselves to their princes, to enquire and consider both at what season and in what manner they may do it best and most effectually, to pacify his anger, obtain his favour, or obtain the revocation of any grievous measure prescribed. Esther, in dealing with Ahasuerus, took a deal of pains to *discern both time and judgment*, and she sped accordingly. This may be taken as a general rule of wisdom, that every thing should be well timed; and our enterprises are *then* likely to succeed, when we embrace the exact opportunity for them.

2. What arguments are here used to engage us to be subject to the higher powers; they are much the same with those which St. Paul uses, Rom. 13:1, etc. (1.) *We must needs be subject, for conscience-sake*, and that is the most powerful principle of subjection. We must be subject because *of the oath of God*, the oath of allegiance which we have taken to be faithful to the government, *the covenant between the king and the people*, 2 Chr. 23:16. *David made a covenant*, or contract, *with the elders of Israel*, though he was king by divine designation, 1 Chr. 11:3. "*Keep the king's commandments*, for he has sworn to rule thee in the fear of God, and thou hast sworn, in that fear, to be faithful to him." It is called *the oath of God* because he is a witness to it and will avenge the violation of it. (2.) *For wrath's sake*, because of the sword which the prince bears and the power he is entrusted with, which make him formidable: *He does whatsoever pleases him*; he has a great authority and a great ability to

support that authority (v. 4): *Where the word of a king is, giving orders to seize a man, there is power*; there are many that will execute his orders, which makes *the wrath of a king*, or supreme government, like *the roaring of a lion* and like *messengers of death*. *Who may say unto him, What doest thou?* He that contradicts him does it at his peril. Kings will not bear to have their orders disputed, but expect they should be obeyed. In short, it is dangerous contending with sovereignty, and what many have repented. A subject is an unequal match for a prince. *He* may command me who has legions at command. (3.) For the sake of our own comfort: *Whoso keeps the commandment, and lives a quiet and peaceable life, shall feel no evil thing*, to which that of the apostle answers (Rom. 13:3), *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power of the king? Do that which is good*, as becomes a dutiful and loyal subject, *and thou shalt ordinarily have praise of the same*. He that does no ill shall feel no ill and needs fear none.

### **Verses 6-8**

Solomon had said (v. 5) that *a wise man's heart discerns time and judgment*, that is, a man's wisdom will go a great way, by the blessing of God, in moral prognostications; but here he shows that few have that wisdom, and that even the wisest may yet be surprised by a calamity which they had not any foresight of, and therefore it is our wisdom to expect and prepare for sudden changes. Observe, 1. All the events concerning us, with the exact time of them, are determined and appointed in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, and all in wisdom: *To every purpose there is a time* prefixed, and it is the best time, for it *is time and judgment*, time appointed both in wisdom and righteousness; the appointment is not chargeable with folly or iniquity. 2. We are very much in the dark concerning future events and the time and season of them: *Man knows not that which shall be* himself; and *who can tell him when or how it shall be?* v. 7. It cannot either be foreseen by him or foretold him; the stars cannot foretel a man what shall be, nor any of the arts of divination. God has, in wisdom, concealed from us the knowledge of future events, that we may be always ready for changes. 3. It is our great unhappiness and misery that, because we cannot foresee an evil, we know not how to avoid it, or guard against it, and, because we are not aware of the proper successful season of actions, therefore we lose our opportunities and miss our way: *Because to every purpose there is* but one way, one method, one proper opportunity, *therefore the misery of man is great upon him*; because it is so hard to hit that, and it is a thousand to one but he misses it. Most of the miseries men labour under would have been prevented if they could have been foreseen and the happy time discovered to avoid them. Men are miserable because they are not sufficiently sagacious and attentive. 4. Whatever other evils may be avoided, we are all under a fatal necessity of dying, v. 8. (1.) When the soul is required it must be resigned, and it is to no purpose to dispute it, either by arms or arguments, by ourselves, or by any friend: *There is no man that has power over his own spirit, to retain it*, when it is summoned to return to God who gave it. It cannot fly any where out of the jurisdiction of death, nor find any place where its writs do not run. It cannot abscond so as to escape death's eye, though it is hidden from the eyes of all living. A man has no power to adjourn the day of his death, nor can he by prayers or bribes obtain a reprieve; no bail will be taken, no *essoine* [excuse], protection, or *imparlance* [conference], allowed. We have not *power over the spirit* of a friend, *to retain* that; the prince, with all his authority, cannot prolong the life of the most valuable of his subjects, nor the physician with his medicines and methods, nor the soldier with his force, not the orator with his

eloquence, nor the best saint with his intercessions. The stroke of death can by no means be put by when our days are determined and the hour appointed us has come. (2.) Death is an enemy that we must all enter the lists with, sooner or later: *There is no discharge in that war*, no dismissal from it, either of the men of business or of the faint-hearted, as there was among the Jews, Deu. 20:5, 8. While we live we are struggling with death, and we shall never put off the harness till we put off the body, never obtain a discharge till death has obtained the mastery; the youngest is not released as a fresh-water soldier, nor the oldest as *miles emeritus*—*a soldier whose merits have entitled him to a discharge*. Death is a battle that must be fought, *There is no sending to that war* (so some read it), no substituting another to muster for us, no champion admitted to fight for us; we must ourselves engage, and are concerned to provide accordingly, as for a battle. (3.) Men's wickedness, by which they often evade or outface the justice of the prince, cannot secure them from the arrest of death, nor can the most obstinate sinner harden his heart against those terrors. Though he *strengthen himself* ever so much *in his wickedness* (Ps. 52:7), death will be too strong for him. The most subtle wickedness cannot outwit death, nor the most impudent wickedness outbrave death. Nay, the wickedness which men give themselves to will be so far from delivering them from death that it will deliver them up to death.

### Verses 9-13

Solomon, in the beginning of the chapter, had warned us against having any thing to do with seditious subjects; here, in these verses, he encourages us, in reference to the mischief of tyrannical and oppressive rulers, such as he had complained of before, ch. 3:16; 4:1.

1. He had observed many such rulers, v. 9. In the serious views and reviews he had taken of the children of men and their state he had observed that many a time *one man rules over another to his hurt*; that is, (1.) To the hurt of the ruled (many understand it so); whereas they ought to be God's ministers unto their subjects *for their good* (Rom. 13:14), to administer justice, and to preserve the public peace and order, they use their power for their hurt, to invade their property, encroach upon their liberty, and patronise the acts of injustice. It is sad with a people when those that should protect their religion and rights aim at the destruction of both. (2.) To the hurt of the rulers (so we render it), *to their own hurt*, to the feeling of their pride and covetousness, the gratifying of their passion and revenge, and so to the filling up of the measure of their sins and the hastening and aggravating of their ruin. *Agens agendo repatitur*—*What hurt men do to others will return, in the end, to their own hurt*.

2. He had observed them to prosper and flourish in the abuse of their power (v. 10): *I saw those wicked rulers come and go from the place of the holy*, go in state to and return in pomp from the place of judicature (which is called *the place of the Holy One* because *the judgment is the Lord's*, Deu. 1:17, and he *judges among the gods*, Ps. 82:1, and *is with them in the judgment*, 2 Chr. 19:6), and they continued all their days in office, were never reckoned with for their mal-administration, but died in honour and were buried magnificently; their commissions were *durante vitâ*—*during life*, and not *quamdiu se bene gesserint*—*during good behaviour*. *And they were forgotten in the city where they had so done*; their wicked practices were not remembered against them to their reproach and infamy when they were gone. Or, rather, it denotes the vanity of their dignity and power, for that is his remark upon it in the close of the verse: *This is also vanity*. They are proud of their wealth, and

power, and honour, because they sit in *the place of the holy*; but all this cannot secure, (1.) Their bodies from being buried in the dust; *I saw* them laid in the grave; and their pomp, though it attended them thither, could *not descend after them*, Ps. 49:17. (2.) Nor their names from being buried in oblivion; for *they were forgotten*, as if they had never been.

3. He had observed that their prosperity hardened them in their wickedness, v. 11. It is true of all sinners in general, and particularly of wicked rulers, that, *because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily*, they think it will never be executed, and therefore they set the law at defiance and *their hearts are full in them to do evil*; they venture to do so much the more mischief, fetch a greater compass in their wicked designs, and are secure and fearless in it, and commit iniquity with a high hand. Observe, (1.) Sentence is passed against evil works and evil workers by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, even against the evil works of princes and great men, as well as of inferior persons. (2.) The execution of this sentence is often delayed a great while, and the sinner goes on, not only unpunished, but prosperous and successful. (3.) Impunity hardens sinners in impiety, and the patience of God is shamefully abused by many who, instead of being led by it to repentance, are confirmed by it in their impenitence. (4.) Sinners herein deceive themselves, for, though the *sentence be not executed speedily*, it will be executed the more severely at last. Vengeance comes slowly, but it comes surely, and wrath is in the mean time *treasured up against the day of wrath*.

4. He foresaw such an end of all these things as would be sufficient to keep us from quarrelling with the divine Providence upon account of them. He supposes a wicked ruler to do an unjust thing *a hundred times*, and that yet his punishment is deferred, and God's patience towards him *is prolonged*, much beyond what was expected, and the days of his power are lengthened out, so that he continues to oppress; yet he intimates that we should not be discouraged. (1.) God's people are certainly a happy people, though they be oppressed: *"It shall be well with those that fear God*, I say with all those, and those only, *who fear before him.*" Note, [1.] It is the character of God's people that they *fear God*, have an awe of him upon their hearts and make conscience of their duty to him, and this because they see his eye always upon them and they know it is their concern to approve themselves to him. When they lie at the mercy of proud oppressors they fear God more than they fear them. They do not quarrel with the providence of God, but submit to it. [2.] It is the happiness of *all that fear God*, that in the worst of times *it shall be well with them*; their happiness in God's favour cannot be prejudiced, nor their communion with God interrupted, by their troubles; they are in a good case, for they are kept in a good frame under their troubles, and in the end they shall have a blessed deliverance from and an abundant recompence for their troubles. And therefore *"surely I know*, I know it by the promise of God, and the experience of all the saints, *that*, however it goes with others, *it shall go well with them.*" All is well that ends well. (2.) Wicked people are certainly a miserable people; though they prosper, and prevail, for a time, the curse is as sure to them as the blessing is to the righteous: *It shall not be well with the wicked*, as others think it is, who judge by outward appearance, and as they themselves expect it will be; nay, *woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with them* (Isa. 3:10, 11); they shall be reckoned with for all the ill they have done; nothing that befalls them shall be really well for them. *Nihil potest ad malos pervenire quod prosit, imo nihil quod non noceat—No event can occur to the wicked which will do them good, rather no event which will not do them harm.* Seneca. Note, [1.] The wicked man's days *are as a shadow*, not only uncertain and

declining, as all men's days are, but altogether unprofitable. A good man's days have some substance in them; he lives to a good purpose. A wicked man's days are all *as a shadow*, empty and worthless. [2.] These days *shall not be prolonged* to what he promised himself; he *shall not live out half his days*, Ps. 55:23. Though they may be *prolonged* (v. 12) beyond what others expected, yet his day shall come to fall. He shall fall short of everlasting life, and then his long life on earth will be worth little. [3.] God's great quarrel with wicked people is for their *not fearing before him*; that is at the bottom of their wickedness, and cuts them off from all happiness.

#### **Verses 14-17**

Wise and good men have, of old, been perplexed with this difficulty, how the prosperity of the wicked and the troubles of the righteous can be reconciled with the holiness and goodness of the God that governs the world. Concerning this Solomon here gives us his advice.

I. He would not have us to be surprised at it, as though some strange thing happened, for he himself saw it in his days, v. 14. 1. He saw *just men to whom it happened according to the work of the wicked*, who, notwithstanding their righteousness, suffered very hard things, and continued long to do so, as if they were to be punished for some great wickedness. 2. He saw *wicked men to whom it happened according to the work of the righteous*, who prospered as remarkably as if they had been rewarded for some good deed, and that from themselves, from God, from men. We see the just troubled and perplexed in their own minds, the wicked easy, fearless, and secure,—the just crossed and afflicted by the divine Providence, the wicked prosperous, successful, and smiled upon,—the just, censured, reproached, and run down, by the higher powers, the wicked applauded and preferred.

II. He would have us to take occasion hence, not to charge God with iniquity, but to charge the world with vanity. No fault is to be found with God; but, as to the world, *This is vanity upon the earth*, and again, *This is also vanity*, that is, it is a certain evidence that the things of this world are not the best things nor were ever designed to make a portion and happiness for us, for, if they had, God would not have allotted so much of this world's wealth to his worst enemies and so much of its troubles to his best friends; there must therefore be another life after this the joys and griefs of which must be real and substantial, and able to make men truly happy or truly miserable, for this world does neither.

III. He would have us not to fret and perplex ourselves about it, or make ourselves uneasy, but cheerfully to enjoy what God has given us in the world, to be content with it and make the best of it, though it be much better with others, and such as we think very unworthy (v. 15): *Then I commended joy*, a holy security and serenity of mind, arising from a confidence in God, and his power, providence, and promise, *because a man has no better thing under the sun* (though a good man has much better things *above the sun*) *than to eat and drink*, that is, soberly and thankfully to make use of the things of this life according as his rank is, *and to be cheerful*, whatever happens, *for that shall abide with him of his labour*. That is all the fruit he has for himself of the pains that he takes in the business of the world; let him therefore take it, and much good may it do him; and let him not deny himself that, out of a peevish discontent because the world does not go as he would have it. *That shall abide with him during the days of his life which God gives him under the sun*. Our present life is a life *under the sun*, but we look for *the life of*

*the world to come*, which will commence and continue when *the sun shall be turned into darkness* and shine no more. This present life must be reckoned by days; this life is given us, and the days of it are allotted to us, by the counsel of God, and therefore while it does last we must accommodate ourselves to the will of God and study to answer the ends of life.

IV. He would not have us undertake to give a reason for that which God does, for *his way is in the sea and his path in the great waters*, past finding out, and therefore we must be contentedly and piously ignorant of the meaning of God's proceedings in the government of the world, v. 16, 17. Here he shows, 1. That both he himself and many others had very closely studied the point, and searched far into the reasons of the prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous. He, for his part, had *applied his heart to know this wisdom, and to see the business that is done*, by the divine Providence, *upon the earth*, to find out if there were any certain scheme, any constant rule or method, by which the affairs of this lower world were administered, any course of government as sure and steady as the course of nature, so that by what is done now we might as certainly foretel what will be done next as by the moon's changing now we can foretel when it will be at the full; this he would fain have found out. Others had likewise set themselves to make this enquiry with so close an application that they could not find time for *sleep, either day or night*, nor find in their hearts to sleep, so full of anxiety were they about these things. Some think Solomon speaks of himself, that he was so eager in prosecuting this great enquiry that he could not sleep for thinking of it. 2. That it was all labour in vain, v. 17. When we look upon *all the works of God* and his providence, and compare one part with another, we *cannot find* that there is any such certain method by which *the work that is done under the sun* is directed; we cannot discover any key by which to decipher the character, nor by consulting precedents can we know the practice of this court, nor what the judgment will be. [1.] *Though a man* be ever so industrious, thou he *labour to seek it out*. [2.] Though he be ever so ingenious, *though* he be *a wise man* in other things, and can fathom the counsels of kings themselves and trace them by their footsteps. Nay, [3.] Though he be very confident of success, though he *think to know it, yet he shall not*; he cannot *find it out*. God's ways are above ours, nor is he tied to his own former ways, but *his judgments are a great deep*

## Chapter 9

Solomon, in this chapter, for a further proof of the vanity of this world, gives us four observations which he had made upon a survey of the state of the children of men in it:—I. He observed that commonly as to outward things, good and bad men fare much alike (v. 1-3). II. That death puts a final period to all our employments and enjoyments in this world (v. 4-6), whence he infers that it is our wisdom to enjoy the comforts of life and mind the business of life, while it lasts (v. 7–10). III. That God's providence often crosses the fairest and most hopeful probabilities of men's endeavour, and great calamities often surprise men ere they are aware (v. 11, 12). IV. That wisdom often makes men very useful, and yet gains them little respect, for that persons of great merit are slighted (v. 13–18). And what is there then in this world that should make us fond of it?

### Verses 1-3

It has been observed concerning those who have pretended to search for the philosophers' stone that, though they could never find what they sought for, yet in the search they have hit upon many other useful discoveries and experiments. Thus Solomon, when, in the close of the foregoing chapter, he *applied his heart to know the work of God*, and took a great deal of pains to search into it, though he despaired of finding it out, yet he found out that which abundantly recompensed him for the search, and gave him some satisfaction, which he here gives us; *for therefore he considered all this in his heart*, and weighed it deliberately, that he might *declare* it for the good of others. Note, What we are *to declare* we should first *consider*; think twice before we speak once; and what we have *considered* we should then *declare*. *I believed, therefore have I spoken*.

The great difficulty which Solomon met with in studying the book of providence was the little difference that is made between good men and bad in the distribution of comforts and crosses, and the disposal of events. This has perplexed the minds of many wise and contemplative men. Solomon discourses of it in these verses, and, though he does not undertake to find out this *work of God*, yet he says that which may prevent its being a stumbling-block to us.

I. Before he describes the temptation in its strength he lays down a great and unquestionable truth, which he resolves to adhere to, and which, if firmly believed, will be sufficient to break the force of the temptation. This has been the way of God's people in grappling with this difficulty. Job, before he discourses of this matter, lays down the doctrine of God's omniscience (Job 24:1), Jeremiah the doctrine of his righteousness (Jer. 12:1), another prophet that of his holiness (Hab. 1:13), the psalmist that of his goodness and peculiar favour to his own people (Ps. 73:1), and that is it which Solomon here fastens upon and resolves to abide by, that, though good and evil seem to be dispensed promiscuously, yet God has a particular care of and concern for his own people: *The righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God*, under his special protection and guidance; all their affairs are managed by him for their good; all their wise and righteous actions *are in his hand*, to be recompensed in the other world, though not in this. They seem as if they were given up *into the hand of their enemies*, but it is not so. Men have *no power against them but what is given them from above*. The events that affect them do not come to pass by chance, but all according to the will and counsel of God, which will turn that to be for them which seemed to be most against them. Let this make us easy, whatever happens, that all God's saints are in his hand, Deu. 33:3; Jn. 10:29; Ps. 31:15.

II. He lays this down for a rule, that the love and hatred of God are not to be measured and judged of by men's outward condition. If prosperity were a certain sign of God's love, and affliction of his hatred, then it might justly be an offence to us to see the wicked and godly fare alike. But the matter is not so: *No man knows either love or hatred by all that is before him* in this world, by those things that are the objects of sense. These we may know by that which is within us; if we love God with all our heart, thereby we may know that he loves us, as we may know likewise that we are under his wrath if we be governed by that carnal mind which is enmity to him. These will be known by that which shall be hereafter, by men's everlasting state; it is certain that men are happy or miserable according as they are under the love or hatred of God, but not according as they are under the smiles or frowns of the world; and therefore if God loves a righteous man (as certainly he does) he is happy, though the world frown upon him; and if he hates a wicked man (as certainly he does) he is miserable, though the world smile upon him. Then the offence of this promiscuous distribution of events has ceased.

III. Having laid down these principles, he acknowledges that *all things come alike to all*; so it has been formerly, and therefore we are not to think it strange if it be so now, if it be so with us and our families. Some make this, and all that follows to v. 13, to be the perverse reasoning of the atheists against the doctrine of God's providence; but I rather take it to be Solomon's concession, which he might the more freely make when he had fixed those truths which are sufficient to guard against any ill use that may be made of what he grants. Observe here (v. 2),

1. The great difference that there is between the characters of the righteous and the wicked, which, in several instances, are set the one over-against the other, to show that, though *all things come alike to all*, yet that does not in the least confound the eternal distinction between moral good and evil, but that remains immutable. (1.) The righteous are *clean*, have *clean hands and pure hearts*; the wicked are *unclean*, under the dominion of unclean lusts, *pure perhaps in their own eyes*, but not *cleansed from their filthiness*, God will certainly put a difference *between the clean and the unclean, the precious and the vile*, in the other world, though he does not seem to do so in this. (2.) The righteous *sacrifice*, that is, they make conscience of worshipping God according to his will, both with inward and outward worship; the wicked *sacrifice not*, that is, they live in the neglect of God's worship and grudge to part with any thing for his honour. *What is the Almighty, that they should serve him?* (3.) The righteous are *good*, good in God's sight, they do good in the world; the wicked are *sinners*, violating the laws of God and man, and provoking to both. (4.) The wicked man *swears*, has no veneration for the name of God, but profanes it by swearing rashly and falsely; but the righteous man *fears an oath*, swears not, but is sworn, and then with great reverence; he fears to take an oath, because it is a solemn appeal to God as a witness and judge; he fears, when he has taken a oath, to break it, because God is righteous who takes vengeance.

2. The little difference there is between the conditions of the righteous and the wicked in this world: *There is one event to both*. Is David rich? So is Nabal. Is Joseph favoured by his prince? So is Haman. Is Ahab killed in a battle? So is Josiah. Are the bad figs carried to Babylon? So are the good, Jer. 24:1. There is a vast difference between the original, the design, and the nature, of the same event to the one and to the other; the effects and issues of it are likewise vastly different; the same providence to the one is *a savour of life unto life*, to the other *of death unto death*, though, to outward appearance, it is the same.

IV. He owns this to be a very great grievance to those that are wise and good: "*This is an evil, the greatest perplexity, among all things that are done under the sun* (v. 3); nothing has given me more disturbance than this, *that there is one event unto all.*" It hardens atheists, and strengthens the hands of evil-doers; for therefore it is that *the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and fully set in them to do evil*, ch. 8:11. When they see that *there is one event to the righteous and the wicked* they wickedly infer thence that it is all one to God whether they are righteous or wicked, and therefore they stick at nothing to gratify their lusts.

V. For the further clearing of this great difficulty, as he began this discourse with the doctrine of the happiness of the righteous (whatever they may suffer, they *and their works are in the hands of God*, and therefore in good hands, they could not be in better), so he concludes with the doctrine of the misery of the wicked; however they may prosper, *madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead*. Envy not the prosperity of evil-doers, for, 1. They are now madmen, and all the delights they seem to be blessed with are but like the pleasant dreams and fancies of a distracted man. They are *mad upon their idols* (Jer. 50:38), are mad against God's people, Acts 26:11. When the prodigal repented, it is said, *He came to himself* (Lu. 15:17), which intimates that he had been beside himself before. 2. They will shortly be dead men. They make a mighty noise and bustle *while they live*, but after awhile, *they go to the dead*, and there is an end of all their pomp and power; they will then be reckoned with for all their madness and outrage in sin. Though, on this side death, the righteous and the wicked seem alike, on the other side death there will be a vast difference between them.

#### **Verses 4-10**

Solomon, in a fret, had *praised the dead more than the living* (ch. 4:2); but here, considering the advantages of life to prepare for death and make sure the hope of a better life, he seems to be of another mind.

I. He shows the advantages which the living have above those that are dead, v. 4-6. 1. While there is life *there is hope*. *Dum spiro, spero—While I breathe, I hope*. It is the privilege of the living that they are *joined to the living*, in relation, commerce, and conversation, and, while they are so, *there is hope*. If a man's condition be, upon any account, bad, *there is hope* it will be amended. If *the heart be full of evil, and madness be in it*, yet while there is life *there is hope* that by the grace of God there may be a blessed change wrought; but after men *go to the dead* (v. 3) it is too late then; he that is then filthy will be filthy still, for ever filthy. If men be thrown aside as useless, yet, while they are *joined to the living*, *there is hope* that they may yet again take root and bear fruit; he that is alive is, or may be, good for something, but he that is dead, as to this world, is not capable of being any further serviceable. Therefore a *living dog is better than a dead lion*; the meanest beggar alive has that comfort of this world and does that service to it which the greatest prince, when he is dead, is utterly incapable of. 2. While there is life there is an opportunity of preparing for death: *The living know* that which the dead have no knowledge of, particularly they *know that they shall die*, and are, or may be, thereby influenced to prepare for that great change which will come certainly, and may come suddenly. Note, *The living cannot but know that they shall die*, that they must needs die. They know they are under a sentence of death; they are already taken into custody by its messengers, and feel themselves declining. This is a needful useful knowledge; for what is our business, while we live, but to get ready to die: *The living know they shall die*; it is a thing

yet to come, and therefore provision may be made for it. The dead know they are dead, and it is too late; they are on the other side the great gulf fixed. 3. When life is gone all this world is gone with it, as to us. (1.) There is an end of all our acquaintance with this world and the things of it: *The dead know not any thing* of that which, while they lived, they were intimately conversant with. It does not appear that they know any thing of what is done by those they leave behind. Abraham is ignorant of us; they are removed *into darkness*, Job 10:22. (2.) There is an end of all our enjoyments in this world: *They have no more a reward* for their toils about the world, but all they got must be left to others; they have a reward for their holy actions, but not for their worldly ones. The meats and the belly will be destroyed together, Jn. 6:27; 1 Co. 6:13. It is explained v. 6. *Neither have they any more a portion for ever*, none of that which they imagined would be *a portion for ever*, of that which *is done* and got *under the sun*. The things of this world will not be a portion for the soul because they will not be a portion for ever; those that choose them, and have them for *their good things*, have only a *portion in this life*, Ps. 17:14. The world can only be an annuity for life, not a *portion for ever*. (3.) There is an end of their name. There are but few whose names survive them long; the grave is a land of forgetfulness, *for the memory of those* that are laid there *is soon forgotten*; *their place knows them no more*, nor the lands they called by their own names. (4.) There is an end of their affections, their friendships and enmities: *Their love, and their hatred, and their envy have now perished*; the good things they loved, the evil things they hated, the prosperity of others, which they envied, are now all at an end with them. Death parts those that loved one another, and puts an end to their friendship, and those that hated one another too, and puts an end to their quarrels. *Actio moritur cum personâ—The person and his actions die together*. There we shall be never the better for our friends (their love can do us no kindness), nor ever the worse for our enemies—their hatred and envy can do us no damage. *There the wicked cease from troubling*. Those things which now so affect us and fill us, which we are so concerned about and so jealous of, will there be at an end.

II. Hence he infers that it is our wisdom to make the best use of life that we can while it does last, and manage wisely what remains of it.

1. Let us relish the comforts of life while we live, and cheerfully take our share of the enjoyments of it. Solomon, having been himself ensnared by the abuse of sensitive delights, warns others of the danger, not by a total prohibition of them, but by directing to the sober and moderate use of them; we may use the world, but must not abuse it, take what is to be had out of it, and expect no more. Here we have,

(1.) The particular instances of this cheerfulness prescribed: "Thou art drooping and melancholy, *go thy way*, like a fool as thou art, and get into a better temper of mind." [1.] "Let thy spirit be easy and pleasant; then let there be *joy* and *a merry heart* within," *a good heart* (so the word is), which distinguishes this from carnal mirth and sensual pleasure, which are the evil of the heart, both a symptom and a cause of much evil there. We must enjoy ourselves, enjoy our friends, enjoy our God, and be careful to keep a good conscience, that nothing may disturb us in these enjoyments. We must serve God with gladness, in the use of what he gives us, and be liberal in communicating it to others, and not suffer ourselves to be oppressed with inordinate care and grief about the world. We must eat our bread as Israelites, *not in our mourning* (Deu. 26:14), as Christians, *with gladness and liberality of heart*, Acts 2:46. See Deu. 28:47. [2.] "Make use of the comforts and enjoyments which God has

given thee: *Eat thy bread, drink thy wine*, thine, not another's, not *the bread of deceit*, nor *the wine of violence*, but that which is honestly got, else thou canst not eat it with any comfort nor expect a blessing upon it—*thy bread* and *thy wine*, such as are agreeable to thy place and station, not extravagantly above it nor sordidly below it; lay out what God has given thee for the ends for which thou art entrusted with it, as being but a steward." [3.] "Evidence thy cheerfulness (v. 8): *Let thy garments be always white*. Observe a proportion in thy expenses; reduce not thy food in order to gratify thy pride, nor thy clothing in order to gratify thy voluptuousness. Be neat, wear clean linen, and be not slovenly." Or, "*Let thy garments be white* in token of joy and cheerfulness," which were expressed by *white raiment* (Rev. 3:4); "and as a further token of joy, *let thy head lack no ointment* that is fit for it." Our Saviour admitted this piece of pleasure at a feast (Mt. 26:7), and David observes it among the gifts of God's bounty to him. Ps. 23:5, *Thou anointest my head with oil*. Not that we must place our happiness in any of the delights of sense, or set our hearts upon them, but what God has given us we must make as comfortable a use of as we can afford, under the limitations of sobriety and wisdom, and not forgetting the poor. [4.] "Make thyself agreeable to thy relations: *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest*. Do not engross thy delights, making much of thyself only, and not caring what becomes of those about thee, but let them share with thee and make them easy too. Have a wife; for even in paradise *it was not good for man to be alone*. Keep to thy wife, to one, and do not multiply wives" (Solomon had found the mischief of that); "keep to her only, and have nothing to do with any other." How can a man live joyfully with one with whom he does not live honestly? "Love thy wife; and *the wife whom thou lovest* thou wilt be likely to *live joyfully with*." When we do the duty of relations we may expect the comfort of them. See Prov. 5:19. "Live with thy wife, and delight in her society. *Live joyfully with her*, and be most cheerful when thou art with her. Take pleasure in thy family, thy vine and thy olive plants."

(2.) The qualifications necessary to this cheerfulness: "Rejoice and have *a merry heart*, if *God now accepts thy works*. If thou art reconciled to God, and recommended to him, then thou has reason to be cheerful, otherwise not." *Rejoice not, O Israel! for joy, as other people, for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*, Hos. 9:1. Our first care must be to make our peace with God, and obtain his favour, to do that which he will accept of, and then, *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy*. Note, Those whose works God has accepted have reason to be cheerful and ought to be so. 'Now that thou eatest the bread of thy sacrifices *with joy*, and partakest of the wine of thy drink-offerings *with a merry heart*, now *God accepts thy works*. Thy religious services, when performed with holy joy, are pleasing to God; he loves to have his servants sing at their work, it proclaims him a good Master.

(3.) The reasons for it. "Live joyfully, for," [1.] "It is all little enough to make thy passage through this world easy and comfortable: *The days of thy life* are the days of *thy vanity*; there is nothing here but trouble, and disappointment. Thou wilt have time enough for sorrow and grief when thou canst not help it, and therefore *live joyfully* while thou canst, and perplex not thyself with thoughts and cares about to-morrow; *sufficient to the day is the evil thereof*. Let a gracious serenity of mind be a powerful antidote against the vanity of the world." [2.] "It is all thou canst get from this world: *That is thy portion* in the things of *this life*. In God, and another life, thou shalt have a better portion, and a better recompence for thy labours in religion; but for thy pains *which thou takest* about the things *under the sun* this is all thou canst expect, and therefore do not deny this to

thyself."

2. Let us apply ourselves to the business of life while life lasts, and so use the enjoyments of it as by them to be fitted for the employments: "Therefore *eat with joy and a merry heart*, not that thy soul may take its ease (as Lu. 12:19), but that thy soul may take the more pains and the joy of the Lord may be its strength and oil to its wheels," v. 10. *Whatsoever thy hand finds to do do it with thy might*. Observe here, (1.) There is not only something to be had, but something to be done, in this life, and the chief good we are to enquire after is *the good we should do*, Eccl. 2:3. This is the world of service; that to come is the world of recompence. This is the world of probation and preparation for eternity; we are here upon business, and upon our good behaviour. (2.) Opportunity is to direct and quicken duty. That is to be done which *our hand finds to do*, which occasion calls for; and an active hand will always find something to do that will turn to a good account. What must be done, of necessity, our hand will here find a price in it for the doing of, Prov. 17:16. (3.) What good we have an opportunity of doing we must do while we have the opportunity, and *do it with our might*, with care, vigour, and resolution, whatever difficulties and discouragements we may meet with in it. Harvest-days are busy days; and we must make hay while the sun shines. Serving God and working out our salvation must be done with *all that is within us*, and all little enough. (4.) There is good reason why we should *work the works of him that sent us while it is day, because the night comes, wherein no man can work*, Jn. 9:4. We must up and be doing now with all possible diligence, because our doing-time will be done shortly and we know not how soon. But this we know that, if the work of life be not done when our time is done, we are undone for ever: "*There is no work to be done, nor device to do it, no knowledge for speculation, nor wisdom for practice, in the grave whither thou goest.*" We are all going towards the grave; every day brings us a step nearer to it; when we are *in the grave* it will be too late to mend the errors of life, too late to repent and make our peace with God, too late to lay up any thing in store for eternal life; it must be done now or never. The grave is a land of darkness and silence, and therefore there is no doing any thing for our souls there; it must be done now or never, Jn. 12:35.

### Verses 11-12

The preacher here, for a further proof of the vanity of the world, and to convince us that *all our works are in the hand of God*, and not in our own hand, shows the uncertainty and contingency of future events, and how often they contradict the prospects we have of them. He had exhorted us (v. 10) to do what we have to do *with all our might*; but here he reminds us that, when we have done all, we must leave the issue with God, and not be confident of the success.

I. We are often disappointed of the good we had great hopes of, v. 11. Solomon had himself made the observation, and so has many a one since, that events, both in public and private affairs, do not always agree even with the most rational prospects and probabilities. *Nulli fortuna tam dedita est ut multa tentanti ubique respondeat—Fortune surrenders herself to no one so as to ensure him success, however numerous his undertakings.* Seneca. The issue of affairs is often unaccountably cross to every one's expectation, that the highest may not presume, nor the lowest despair, but all may live in a humble dependence upon God, from whom every man's judgment proceeds.

1. He gives instances of disappointment, even where means and instruments were most encouraging and promised fair. (1.)

One would think that the lightest of foot should, in running, win the prize; and yet *the race is not always to the swift*; some accident happens to retard them, or they are too secure, and therefore remiss, and let those that are slower get the start of them. (2.) One would think that, in fighting, the most numerous and powerful army should be always victorious, and, in single combat, that the bold and mighty champion should win the laurel; but *the battle is not always to the strong*; a host of Philistines was once put to flight by Jonathan and his man; *one of you shall chase a thousand*; the goodness of the cause has often carried the day against the most formidable power. (3.) One would think that men of sense should always be men of substance, and that those who know how to live in the world should not only have a plentiful maintenance, but get great estates; and yet it does not always prove so; even *bread is not always to the wise*, much less *riches always to men of understanding*. Many ingenious men, and men of business, who were likely to thrive in the world, have strangely gone backward and come to nothing. (4.) One would think that those who understand men, and have the art of management, should always get preferment and obtain the smiles of great men; but many ingenious men have been disappointed, and have spent their days in obscurity, nay, have fallen into disgrace, and perhaps have ruined themselves by those very methods by which they hoped to raise themselves, for *favour is not always to men of skill*, but fools are favoured and wise men frowned upon. 2. He resolves all these disappointments into an over-ruling power and providence, the disposals of which to us seem casual, and we call them *chance*, but really they are according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, here called *time*, in the language of this book, ch. 3:1; Ps. 31:15. *Time and chance happen to them all*. A sovereign Providence breaks men's measures, and blasts their hopes, and teaches them that the way of man is not in himself, but subject to the divine will. We must use means, but not trust to them; if we succeed, we must give God the praise (Ps. 44:3); if we be crossed, we must acquiesce in his will and take our lot.

II. We are often surprised with the evils we were in little fear of (v. 12): *Man knows not his time*, the time of his calamity, his fall, his death, which, in scripture, is called *our day* and *our hour*. 1. We know not what troubles are before us, which will take us off our business, and take us out of the world, what *time and chance will happen to us*, nor what *one day*, or a night, *may bring forth*. It is *not for us to know the times*, no, not our own time, when or how we shall die. God has, in wisdom, kept us in the dark, that we may be always ready. 2. Perhaps we may meet with trouble in that very thing wherein we promise ourselves the greatest satisfaction and advantage; as the fishes and the birds are drawn into the snare and net by the bait laid to allure them, which they greedily catch at, so are the sons of men often *snares in an evil time*, when it falls suddenly upon them, before they are aware. And these things too *come alike to all*. Men often find their bane where they sought their blessing, and catch their death where they thought to find a prize. Let us therefore never be secure, but always ready for changes, that, though they may be sudden, they may be no surprise or terror to us.

### **Verses 13-18**

Solomon still recommends wisdom to us as necessary to the preserving of our peace and the perfecting of our business, notwithstanding the vanities and crosses which human affairs are subject to. He had said (v. 11), *Bread is not always to the wise*; yet he would not therefore be thought either to disparage, or to discourage, wisdom, no, he still retains his principle, that

*wisdom excels folly as much as light excels darkness* (ch. 2:13), and we ought to love and embrace it, and be governed by it, for the sake of its own intrinsic worth, and the capacity it gives us of being serviceable to others, though we ourselves should not get wealth and preferment by it. This wisdom, that is, this which he here describes, wisdom which enables a man to serve his country out of pure affection to its interests, when he himself gains no advantage by it, no, not so much as thanks for his pains, or the reputation of it, this is the wisdom which, Solomon says, *seemed great unto him*, v. 13. A public spirit, in a private sphere, is wisdom which those who understand things that differ cannot but look upon as very magnificent.

I. Solomon here gives an instance, which probably was a case in fact, in some neighbouring country, of a *poor man* who with his wisdom did great service in a time of public distress and danger (v. 14): *There was a little city* (no great prize, whoever was master of it); there were but *few men within it*, to defend it, and men, if men of fortitude, are the best fortifications of a city; here were *few men*, and, because few, feeble, fearful, and ready to give up their city as not tenable. Against this little city a *great king* came with a numerous army, and besieged it, either in pride, or covetousness to possess it, or in revenge for some affront given him, to chastise and destroy it. Thinking it stronger than it was, he *built great bulwarks against it*, from which to batter it, and doubted not but in a little time to make himself master of it. What a great deal of unjust vexation do ambitious princes give to their harmless neighbours! This *great king* needed not fear this *little city*; why then should he frighten it? It would be little profit to him; why then should he put himself to such a great expense to gain it? But as unreasonable and insatiably greedy as little people sometimes are to *lay house to house, and field to field*, great kings often are to lay city to city, and province to province, *that they may be placed alone in the earth*, Isa. 5:8. Did victory and success attend the *strong*? No; there was found in this little city, among the few men that were in it, *one poor wise man*—a wise man, and yet poor, and not preferred to any place of profit or power in the city; places of trust were not given to men according to their merit, and meetness for them, else such a wise man as this would not have been a poor man. Now, 1. Being wise, he served the city, though he was poor. In their distress they found him out (Jdg. 11:7) and begged his advice and assistance; and *he by his wisdom delivered the city*, either by prudent instructions given to the besieged, directing them to some unthought-of stratagem for their own security, or by a prudent treaty with the besiegers, as the woman at Abel, 2 Sa. 20:16. He did not upbraid them with the contempt they had put upon him, in leaving him out of their council, nor tell them he was poor and had nothing to lose, and therefore cared not what became of the city; but he did his best for it, and was blessed with success. Note, Private interests and personal resentments must always be sacrificed to public good and forgotten when the common welfare is concerned. 2. Being poor, he was slighted by the city, though he was wise and had been an instrument to save them all from ruin: *No man remembered that same poor man*; his good services were not taken notice of, no recompence was made him, no marks of honour were put upon him, but he lived in as much poverty and obscurity as he had done before. *Riches were not to this man of understanding, nor favour to this man of skill*. Many who have well-merited of their prince and country have been ill-paid; such an ungrateful world do we live in. It is well that useful men have a God to trust to, who will be their bountiful rewarder; for, among men, great services are often envied and rewarded with evil for good.

II. From this instance he draws some useful inferences, looks upon it and receives instruction. 1. Hence he observes the great

usefulness and excellency of wisdom, and what a blessing it makes men to their country: *Wisdom is better than strength*, v. 16. A prudent mind, which is the honour of a man, is to be preferred before a robust body, in which many of the brute creatures excel man. A man may by his wisdom effect that which he could never compass by his strength, and may overcome those by out-witting them who are able to overpower him. Nay, *wisdom is better than weapons of war*, offensive or defensive, v. 18. *Wisdom*, that is, religion and piety (for the wise man is here opposed to a sinner), is better than all military endowments or accoutrements, for it will engage God for us, and then we are safe in the greatest perils and successful in the greatest enterprises. *If God be for us, who can be against us* or stand before us? 2. Hence he observes the commanding force and power of wisdom, though it labour under external disadvantages (v. 17): *The words of wise men are heard in quiet*; what they speak, being spoken calmly and with deliberation (though, not being rich and in authority, they dare not speak aloud nor with any great assurance), will be hearkened to and regarded, will gain respect, nay, will gain the point, and sway with men more than the imperious clamour of him that *rules among fools*, who, like fools, chose him to be their ruler, for his noise and blustering, and, like fools, think he must by those methods carry the day with every body else. A few close arguments are worth a great many big words; and those will strike sail to fair reasoning who will answer those that hector and insult *according to their folly*. *How forcible are right words!* What is spoken wisely should be spoken calmly, and then it will be heard in quiet and calmly considered. But passion will lessen the force even of reason, instead of adding any force to it. 3. Hence he observes that wise and good men, notwithstanding this, must often content themselves with the satisfaction of having done good, or at least attempted it, and offered at it, when they cannot do the good they would do nor have the praise they should have. Wisdom capacitates a man to serve his neighbours, and he offers his service; but, alas! if he be poor his wisdom is despised and *his words are not heard*, v. 16. Many a man is buried alive in poverty and obscurity who, if he had but fit encouragement given him, might be a great blessing to the world; many a pearl is lost in its shell. But there is a day coming when wisdom and goodness shall be in honour, and the *righteous shall shine forth*.

4. From what he had observed of the great good which one wise and virtuous man may do he infers what a great deal of mischief one wicked man may do, and what a great deal of good he may be the hindrance of: *One sinner destroyeth much good*. (1.) As to himself, a sinful condition is a wasteful condition. How many of the good gifts both of nature and Providence does one sinner destroy and make waste of—good sense, good parts, good learning, a good disposition, a good estate, good meat, good drink, and abundance of God's good creatures, all made use of in the service of sin, and so destroyed and lost, and the end of giving them frustrated and perverted! He who destroys his own soul destroys much good. (2.) As to others, what a great deal of mischief may one wicked man do in a town or country! One sinner, who makes it his business to debauch others, may defeat and frustrate the intentions of a great many good laws and a great deal of good preaching, and draw many into his pernicious ways; one sinner may be the ruin of a town, as one Achan troubled the whole camp of Israel. The wise man who delivered the city would have had his due respect and recompence for it but that some one sinner hindered it, and invidiously diminished the service. And many a good project, well laid for the public welfare, had been destroyed by some one subtle adversary to it. The wisdom of some would have healed the nation, but, through the wickedness of a few, it would not be

healed. See who are a kingdom's friends and enemies, if one saint does much good, and one sinner destroys much good.

## Chapter 10

This chapter seems to be like Solomon's proverbs, a collection of wise sayings and observations, rather than a part of his sermon; but the preacher studied to be sententious, and "set in order many proverbs," to be brought in in his preaching. Yet the general scope of all the observations in this chapter is to recommend wisdom to us, and its precepts and rules, as of great use for the right ordering of our conversation and to caution us against folly. I. He recommends wisdom to private persons, who are in an inferior station. 1. It is our wisdom to preserve our reputation, in managing our affairs dexterously (v. 1-3). 2. To be submissive to our superiors if at any time we have offended them (v. 4). 3. To live quiet and peaceable lives, and not to meddle with those that are factious and seditious, and are endeavouring to disturb the government and the public repose, the folly and danger of which disloyal and turbulent practices he shows (v. 8-11). 4. To govern our tongues well (v. 12-15). 5. To be diligent in our business and provide well for our families (v. 18, 19). 6. Not to speak ill of our rulers, no, not in secret (v. 20). II. He recommends wisdom to rulers; let them not think that, because their subjects must be quiet under them, therefore they may do what they please; no, but, 1. Let them be careful whom they prefer to places of trust and power (v. 5-7). 2. Let them manage themselves discreetly, be generous and not childish, temperate and not luxurious (v. 16, 17). Happy the nation when princes and people make conscience of their duty according to these rules.

### Verses 1-3

In these verses Solomon shows,

I. What great need wise men have to take heed of being guilty of any instance of folly; for *a little folly* is a great blemish to him that *is in reputation for wisdom and honour*, and is as hurtful to his good name as *dead flies* are to a sweet perfume, not only spoiling the sweetness of it, but making it *to send forth a stinking savour*. Note, 1. True wisdom is true honour, and will gain a man a reputation, which is like a box of precious ointment, pleasing and very valuable. 2. The reputation that is got with difficulty, and by a great deal of wisdom, may be easily lost, and by a *little folly*, because envy fastens upon eminency, and makes the worst of the mistakes and miscarriages of those who are cried up for wisdom, and improves them to their disadvantage; so that the folly which in another would not be taken notice of in them is severely censured. Those who make a great profession of religion have need to walk very circumspectly, to *abstain from all appearances of evil*, and approaches towards it, because many eyes are upon them, that watch for their halting; their character is soon sullied, and they have a great deal of reputation to lose.

II. What a deal of advantage a wise man has above a fool in the management of business (v. 2): *A wise man's heart is at his right hand*, so that he goes about his business with dexterity, turns his hand readily to it, and goes through it with despatch; his counsel and courage are ready to him, whenever he has occasion for them. But *a fool's heart is at his left hand*; it is always to seek when he has any thing to do that is of importance, and therefore he goes awkwardly about it, like a man that is left-handed; he is soon at a loss and at his wits' end.

III. How apt fools are at every turn to proclaim their own folly, and expose themselves; he that is either witless or graceless,

either silly or wicked, if he be ever so little from under the check, and left to himself, if he but *walk by the way*, soon shows what he is; his *wisdom fails him*, and, by some impropriety or other, *he says to every one he meets that he is a fool* (v. 3), that is, he discovers his folly as plainly as if he had told them so. He cannot conceal it, and he is not ashamed of it. Sin is the reproach of sinners wherever they go.

### Verses 4-11

The scope of these verses is to keep subjects loyal and dutiful to the government. In Solomon's reign the people were very rich, and lived in prosperity, which perhaps made them proud and petulant, and when the taxes were high, though they had enough to pay them with, it is probable that many conducted themselves insolently towards the government and threatened to rebel. To such Solomon here gives some necessary cautions.

I. Let not subjects carry on a quarrel with their prince upon any private personal disgust (v. 4): "*If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee*, if upon some misinformation given him, or some mismanagement of thine, he is displeased at thee, and threaten thee, *yet leave not thy place*, forget not the duty of a subject, revolt not from thy allegiance, do not, in a passion, quit thy post in his service and throw up thy commission, as despairing ever to regain his favour. No, wait awhile, and thou wilt find he is not implacable, but that *yielding pacifies great offences*." Solomon speaks for himself, and for every wise and good man that is a master, or a magistrate, that he could easily forgive those, upon their submission, whom yet, upon their provocation, he had been very angry with. It is safer and better to yield to an angry prince than to contend with him.

II. Let not subjects commence a quarrel with their prince, though the public administration be not in every thing as they would have it. He grants *there is an evil often seen under the sun*, and it is a king's-evil, an evil which the king only can cure, for *it is an error which proceeds from the ruler* (v. 5); it is a mistake which rulers, consulting their personal affections more than the public interests, are too often guilty of, that men are not preferred according to their merit, but *folly is set in great dignity*, men of shattered brains, and broken fortunes, are put in places of power and trust, while the rich men of good sense and good estates, whose interest would oblige them to be true to the public, and whose abundance would be likely to set them above temptations to bribery and extortion, yet sit in low places, and can get no preferment (v. 6), either the ruler knows not how to value them or the terms of preferment are such as they cannot in conscience comply with. It is ill with a people when vicious men are advanced and men of worth are kept under hatches. This is illustrated v. 7. "*I have seen servants upon horses*, men not so much of mean extraction and education (if that were all, it were the more excusable, nay, there is many a wise servant who with good reason *has rule over a son that causes shame*), but of sordid, servile, mercenary dispositions. I have seen these riding in pomp and state as princes, while princes, men of noble birth and qualities, fit to rule a kingdom, have been forced to *walk as servants upon the earth*, poor and despised." Thus God, in his providence, punishes a wicked people; but, as far as it is the ruler's act and deed, it is certainly his *error*, and a *great evil*, a grievance to the subject and very provoking; but it is *an error under the sun*, which will certainly be rectified above the sun, and when it shall shine no more, for in heaven it is only wisdom and holiness that are set in great dignity. But, if the prince be guilty of his error, yet let not the subjects *leave their place*, nor rise up against the government, nor form any project for the alteration of it; nor let the prince carry on the humour

too far, nor set such servants, such beggars, on horseback, as will ride furiously over the ancient land-marks of the constitution, and threaten the subversion of it.

1. Let neither prince nor people violently attempt any changes, nor make a forcible entry upon a national settlement, for they will both find it of dangerous consequence, which he shows here by four similitudes, the scope of which is to give us a caution not to meddle to our own hurt. Let not princes invade the rights and liberties of their subjects; let not subjects mutiny and rebel against their princes; for, (1.) *He that digs a pit* for another, it is ten to one but he *falls into it* himself, and his violent dealing returns upon his own head. If princes become tyrants, or subjects become rebels, all histories will tell both what is likely to be their fate and that it is at their utmost peril, and it were better for both to be content within their own bounds. (2.) *Whoso breaks a hedge*, an old hedge, that has long been a land-mark, let him expect that a *serpent*, or *adder*, such as harbour in rotten hedges, will *bite him*; some viper or other will fasten upon his hand, Acts 28:3. God, by his ordinance, as by a hedge, has inclosed the prerogatives and powers of princes; their persons are under his special protection; those therefore that form any treasonable designs against their peace, their crown, and dignity, are but twisting halters for themselves. (3.) *Whoso removes stones*, to pull down a wall or building, does but pluck them upon himself; he shall be *hurt therewith*, and will wish that he had let them alone. Those that go about to alter a well-modelled well-settled government, under colour of redressing some grievances and correcting some faults in it, will quickly perceive not only that it is easier to find fault than to mend, to demolish that which is good than to build up that which is better, but that they thrust their own fingers into the fire and overwhelm themselves in the ruin they occasion. (4.) *He that cleaves the wood*, especially if, as it follows, he has sorry tools (v. 10), *shall be endangered thereby*; the chips, or his own axe-head, will fly in his face. If we meet with knotty pieces of timber, and we think to master them by force and violence, and hew them to pieces, they may not only prove too hard for us, but the attempt may turn to our own damage.

2. Rather let both prince and people act towards each other with prudence, mildness, and good temper: *Wisdom is profitable to direct* the ruler how to manage a people that are inclined to be turbulent, so as neither, on the one hand, by a supine negligence to embolden and encourage them, nor, on the other hand, by rigour and severity to exasperate and provoke them to any seditious practices. It is likewise profitable to direct the subjects how to act towards a prince that is inclined to bear hard upon them, so as not to alienate his affections from them, but to win upon him by humble remonstrances (not insolent demands, such as the people made upon Rehoboam), by patient submissions and peaceable expedients. The same rule is to be observed in all relations, for the preserving of the comfort of them. Let wisdom direct to gentle methods and forbear violent ones. (1.) Wisdom will teach us to whet the tool we are to make use of, rather than, by leaving it blunt, oblige ourselves to exert so much the *more strength*, v. 10. We might save ourselves a great deal of labour, and prevent a great deal of danger, if we did whet before we cut, that is, consider and premeditate what is fit to be said and done in every difficult case, that we may accommodate ourselves to it and may do our work smoothly and easily both to others and to ourselves. Wisdom will direct how to sharpen and put an edge upon both ourselves and those we employ, not to *work deceitfully* (Ps. 52:2), but to work cleanly and cleverly. The mower loses no time when he is whetting his scythe. (2.) Wisdom will teach us to enchant the serpent we are to contend

with, rather than think to out-hiss it (v. 11): *The serpent will bite* if he be not by singing and music charmed and enchanted, against which therefore he *stops his ears* (Ps. 58:4, 5); *and a babbler is no better* to all those who enter the lists with him, who therefore must not think by dint of words to out-talk him, but be prudent management to enchant him. *He that is lord of the tongue* (so the phrase is), a ruler that has liberty of speech and may say what he will, it is as dangerous dealing with him as with a serpent uncharmed; but, if you use the enchantment of a mild and humble submission, you may be safe and out of danger; herein *wisdom*, the meekness of wisdom, *is profitable to direct*. *By long forbearing is a prince persuaded*, Prov. 25:15. Jacob enchanted Esau with a present and Abigail David. To those that may say any thing it is wisdom to say nothing that is provoking.

### Verses 12-15

Solomon, having shown the benefit of wisdom, and of what great advantage it is to us in the management of our affairs, here shows the mischief of folly and how it exposes men, which perhaps comes in as a reflection upon those rulers who *set folly in great dignity*.

I. Fools talk a great deal to no purpose, and they show their folly as much by the multitude, impertinence, and mischievousness of their words, as by any thing; whereas *the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious*, are grace, manifest grace in his heart and minister grace to the hearers, are good, and such as become him, and do good to all about him, *the lips of a fool* not only expose him to reproach and make him ridiculous, but *will swallow up himself* and bring him to ruin, by provoking the government to take cognizance of his seditious talk and call him to an account for it. Adonijah foolishly *spoke against his own life*, 1 Ki. 2:23. Many a man has been sunk by having *his own tongue fall upon him*, Ps. 64:8. See what a fool's talk is. 1. It takes rise from his own weakness and wickedness: *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness*, the foolishness bound up in his heart, that is the corrupt spring out of which all these polluted streams flow, the evil treasure out of which evil things are brought. As soon as he begins to speak you may perceive his folly; at the very first he talks idly, and passionately, and like himself. 2. It rises up to fury, and tends to the hurt and injury of others: *The end of his talk*, the end it comes to, *is madness*. He will presently talk himself into an indecent heat, and break out into the wild extravagancies of a distracted man. The end he aims at is mischief; as, at first, he appeared to have little government of himself, so, at last, it appears he has a great deal of malice to his neighbours; that root of bitterness bears gall and wormwood. Note, It is not strange if those that begin foolishly end madly; for an ungoverned tongue, the more liberty is allowed, grows the more violent. 3. It is all the same over and over (v. 14): *A fool also is full of words*, a passionate fool especially, that runs on endlessly and never knows when to leave off. He will have the last word, though it be but the same with that which was the first. What is wanting in the weight and strength of his words he endeavours in vain to make up in the number of them; and they must be repeated, because otherwise there is nothing in them to make them regarded. Note, Many who are empty of sense are *full of words*; and the least solid are the most noisy. The following words may be taken either, (1.) As checking him for his vainglorious boasting in the multitude of his words, what he will do and what he will have, not considering that which every body knows that *a man cannot tell what shall be* in his own time, while he lives (Prov. 27:1), much less can one tell *what shall be after him*, when he is dead and gone.

Would we duly consider our own ignorance of, and uncertainty about, future events, it would cut off a great many of the idle words we foolishly multiply. Or, (2.) As mocking him for his tautologies. He is *full of words*, for if he do but speak the most trite and common thing, *a man cannot tell what shall be*, because he loves to hear himself talk, he will say it again, *what shall be after him who can tell him?* like Battus in Ovid:

—Sub illis

Montibus (inquit) erant, et erant sub montibus illis—

Under those mountains were they,

They were under those mountains, I say—

whence vain repetitions are called *Battologies*, Mt. 6:7.

II. Fools toil a great deal to no purpose (v. 15); *The labour of the foolish*, to accomplish their designs, *wearies every one of them*. 1. They weary themselves in that labour which is very foolish and absurd. All their labour is for the world and the body, and the meat that perishes, and in this labour they spend their strength, and exhaust their spirits, and *weary themselves for very vanity*, Hab. 2:13; Isa. 55:2. They choose that service which is perfect drudgery rather than that which is perfect liberty. 2. That labour which is necessary, and would be profitable, and might be gone through with ease, wearies them, because they go about it awkwardly and foolishly, and so make their business a toil to them, which, if they applied themselves to it prudently, would be a pleasure to them. Many complain of the labours of religion as grievous, which they would have no reason to complain of if the exercises of Christian piety were always under the direction of Christian prudence. The foolish tire themselves in endless pursuits, and never bring any thing to pass, *because they know not how to go to the city*, that is, because they have not capacity to apprehend the plainest thing, such as the entrance into a great city is, where one would think it were impossible for a man to miss his road. Men's imprudent management of their business robs them both of the comfort and of the benefit of it. But it is the excellency of the way to the heavenly city that it is a high-way, in which the *wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err* (Isa. 35:8); yet sinful folly makes men miss that way.

### **Verses 16-20**

Solomon here observes,

I. How much the happiness of a land depends upon the character of its rulers; it is well or ill with the people according as the princes are good or bad. 1. The people cannot be happy when their princes are childish and voluptuous (v. 16): *Woe unto thee, O land!* even the land of Canaan itself, though otherwise the glory of all lands, when *thy king is a child*, not so much in age (Solomon himself was young when his kingdom was happy in him) as in understanding; when the prince is weak and foolish as a child, fickle and fond of changes, fretful and humoursome, easily imposed upon, and hardly brought to business, it is ill with the people. The body staggers if the head be giddy. Perhaps Solomon wrote this with a foresight of his son Rehoboam's ill conduct (2 Chr. 13:7); he was a child all the days of his life and his family and kingdom fared the worse for it. Nor is it much better with a people when their princes *eat in the morning*, that is, make a god of their belly and make themselves slaves to their appetites. If the king himself be a child, yet if the princes and privy-counsellors are wise and faithful, and apply

themselves to business, the land may do the better; but if they addict themselves to their pleasures, and prefer the gratifications of the flesh before the despatch of the public business, which they disfit themselves for by eating and drinking *in a morning*, when judges are epicures, and do not eat to live, but live to eat, what good can a nation expect! 2. The people cannot but be happy when their rulers are generous and active, sober and temperate, and men of business, v. 17. The land is then blessed, (1.) When the sovereign is governed by principles of honour, *when the king is the son of nobles*, actuated and animated by a noble spirit, which scorns to do any thing base and unbecoming so high a character, which is solicitous for the public welfare, and prefers that before any private interests. Wisdom, virtue, and the fear of God, beneficence, and a readiness to do good to all mankind, these ennoble the royal blood. 2. When the subordinate magistrates are more in care to discharge their trusts than to gratify their appetites; when they *eat in due season* (Ps. 145:15); let us not take ours unseasonable, lest we lose the comfort of seeing God give it to us. Magistrates should *eat for strength*, that their bodies may be fitted to serve their souls in the service of God and their country, *and not for drunkenness*, to make themselves unfit to do any thing either for God or man, and particularly to *sit in judgment*, for they will *err through wine* (Isa. 28:7), will *drink and forget the law*, Prov. 31:5. It is well with a people when their princes are examples of temperance, when those that have most to spend upon themselves know how to deny themselves.

II. Of what ill consequence slothfulness is both to private and public affairs (v. 18): *By much slothfulness and idleness of the hands*, the neglect of business, and the love of ease and pleasure, *the building decays, drops through* first, and by degrees drops down. If it be not kept well covered, and care be not taken to repair the breaches, as any happen, it will rain in, and the timber will rot, and the house will become unfit to dwell in. It is so with the family and the affairs of it; if men cannot find in their hearts to take pains in their callings, to tend their shops and look after their own business, they will soon run in debt and go behind-hand, and, instead of making what they have more for their children, will make it less. It is so with the public; if the king be *a child* and will take no care, if the *princes eat in the morning* and will take no pains, the affairs of the nation suffer loss, and its interests are prejudiced, its honour is sullied, its power is weakened, its borders are encroached upon, the course of justice is obstructed, the treasure is exhausted, and all its foundations are out of course, and all this through the slothfulness of self-seeking of those that should be the *repairers of its breaches and the restorers of paths to dwell in*, Isa. 58:12.

III. How industrious generally all are, both princes and people, to get money, because that serves for all purposes, v. 19. He seems to prefer money before mirth: *A feast is made for laughter*, not merely for eating, but chiefly for pleasant conversation and the society of friends, not the laughter of the fool, which is madness, but that of wise men, by which they fit themselves for business and severe studies. Spiritual feasts are made for spiritual laughter, holy joy in God. *Wine makes merry, makes glad the life, but money* is the measure of all things and *answers all things*. *Pecuniae obediunt omnia—Money commands all things*. Though *wine make merry*, it will not be a house for us, nor a bed, nor clothing, nor provisions and portions for children; *but money*, if men have enough of it, will be all these. The feast cannot be made without money, and, though men have wine, they are not so much disposed to be merry unless they have money for the necessary supports of life. Money of itself answers nothing; it will neither feed nor clothe; but, as it is the instrument of commerce, it answers all the occasions of this present life.

What is to be had may be had for money. But it answers nothing to the soul; it will not procure the pardon of sin, the favour of God, the peace of conscience; the soul, as it is not redeemed, so it is not maintained, with *corruptible things as silver and gold*. Some refer this to rulers; it is ill with the people when they give up themselves to luxury and riot, feasting and making merry, not only because their business is neglected, but because money must be had to *answer all these things*, and, in order to that, the people squeezed by heavy taxes.

IV. How cautious subjects have need to be that they harbour not any disloyal purposes in their minds, nor keep up any factious cabals or consultations against the government, because it is ten to one that they are discovered and brought to light, v. 20. "Though rulers should be guilty of some errors, yet be not, upon all occasions, arraigning their administration and running them down, but make the best of them." Here, 1. The command teaches us our duty "*Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought, do not wish ill to the government in thy mind.*" All sin begins there, and therefore the first risings of it must be curbed and suppressed, and particularly that of treason and sedition. "*Curse not the rich, the princes and governors, in thy bed-chamber, in a conclave or club of persons disaffected to the government; associate not with such; come not into their secret; join not with them in speaking ill of the government or plotting against it.*" 2. The reason consults our safety. "Though the design be carried on ever so closely, *a bird of the air shall carry the voice* to the king, who has more spies about than thou art aware of, *and that which has wings shall tell the matter*, to thy confusion and ruin." God sees what men do, and hears what they say, in secret; and, when he pleases, he can bring it to light by strange and unsuspected ways. Wouldst *thou then not be hurt by the powers that be, nor be afraid of them? Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same; but, if thou do that which is evil, be afraid*, Rom. 13:3, 4.

## Chapter 11

In this chapter we have, I. A pressing exhortation to works of charity and bounty to the poor, as the best cure of the vanity which our worldly riches are subject to and the only way of making them turn to a substantial good account (v. 1-6). II. A serious admonition to prepare for death and judgment, and to begin betimes, even in the days of our youth, to do so (v. 7-10).

### Verses 1-6

Solomon had often, in this book, pressed it upon rich people to take the comfort of their riches themselves; here he presses it upon them to do good to others with them and to abound in liberality to the poor, which will, another day, abound to their account. Observe,

I. How the duty itself is recommended to us, v. 1. 1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters, thy bread-corn upon the low places* (so some understand it), alluding to the husbandman, who *goes forth, bearing precious seed*, sparing bread-corn from his family for the seedness, knowing that without that he can have no harvest another year; thus the charitable man takes from his bread-corn for seed-corn, abridges himself to supply the poor, that he may *sow beside all waters* (Isa. 32:20), because as he sows so he must *reap*, Gal. 6:7. We read of the *harvest of the river*, Isa. 23:3. Waters, in scripture, are put for multitudes (Rev. 16:5), and there are multitudes of poor (we do not want objects of charity); waters are put also for mourners: the poor are men of sorrows. Thou must give *bread*, the necessary supports of life, not only give good words but *good things*, Isa. 58:7. It must be *thy bread*, that which is honestly got; it is no charity, but injury, to give that which is none of our own to give; first *do justly*, and then *love mercy*. "*Thy bread*, which thou didst design for thyself, let the poor have a share with thee, as they had with Job, ch. 31:17. Give freely to the poor, as that which is *cast upon the waters*. Send it a voyage, send it as a venture, as merchants that trade by sea. Trust it *upon the waters*; it shall not sink."

2. "*Give a portion to seven and also to eight*, that is, be free and liberal in works of charity." (1.) "Give much if thou hast much to give, not a pittance, but *a portion*, not a bit or two, but a mess, a meal; give a large dole, not a paltry one; give *good measure* (Lu. 6:38); be generous in giving, as those were when, on festival days, they *sent portions to those for whom nothing was prepared* (Neh. 8:10), worthy portions." (2.) "Give to many, *to seven, and also to eight*; if thou meet with seven objects of charity, give to them all, and then, if thou meet with an eighth, give to that, and if with eight more, give to them all too. Excuse not thyself with the good thou hast done from the good thou hast further to do, but hold on, and mend. In hard times, when the number of the poor increases, let thy charity be proportionably enlarged." God is rich in mercy to all, to us, though unworthy; he *gives liberally, and upbraids not* with former gifts, and we must be merciful as our heavenly Father is.

II. The reasons with which it is pressed upon us. Consider,

1. Our reward for well-doing is very certain. "Though thou *cast it upon the waters*, and it seem lost, thou thinkest thou hast given thy good word with it and art likely never to hear of it again, yet *thou shalt find it after many days*, as the husbandman finds his seed again in a plentiful harvest and the merchant his venture in a rich return. It is not lost, but well laid out, and well laid up; it brings in full interest in the present gifts of God's providence, and graces and comforts of his Spirit; and the principal

is sure, laid up in heaven, for it is *lent to the Lord*." Seneca, a heathen, could say, *Nihil magis possidere me credam, quam bene donata—I possess nothing so completely as that which I have given away. Hochabeo quodcunque dedi; hae sunt divitiae certae in quacunque sortis humanae levitate—Whatever I have imparted I still possess; these riches remain with me through all the vicissitudes of life. "Thou shalt find it, perhaps not quickly, but after many days; the return may be slow, but it is sure and will be so much the more plentiful."* Wheat, the most valuable grain, lies longest in the ground. Long voyages make the best returns.

2. Our opportunity for well-doing is very uncertain: *"Thou knowest not what evil may be upon the earth, which may deprive thee of thy estate, and put thee out of a capacity to do good, and therefore, while thou hast wherewithal, be liberal with it, improve the present season, as the husbandman in sowing his ground, before the frost comes."* We have reason to expect *evil upon the earth*, for we are born to trouble; what the evil may be we *know not*, but that we may be ready for it, whatever it is, it is our wisdom, in the day of prosperity, to be in good, to be doing good. Many make use of this as an argument against giving to the poor, because they know not what hard times may come when they may want themselves; whereas we should therefore rather be charitable, that, when *evil days come*, we may have the comfort of having done good while we were able; we would then hope to find mercy both with God and man, and therefore should now show mercy. If by charity we trust God with what we have, we put it into good hands against bad times.

III. How he obviates the objections which might be made against this duty and the excuses of the uncharitable.

1. Some will say that what they have is their own and they have it for their own use, and will ask, Why should we *cast it thus upon the waters*? Why should *I take my bread, and my flesh, and give it to I know not whom*? So Nabal pleaded, 1 Sa. 25:11. "Look up, man, and consider how soon thou wouldest be starved in a barren ground, *if the clouds* over thy head should plead thus, that they have their waters for themselves; but thou seest, when they are *full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth*, to make it fruitful, till they are wearied and spent with watering it, Job 37:11. Are the heavens thus bountiful to the poor earth, that is so far below them, and wilt thou grudge thy bounty to thy poor brother, who is *bone of thy bone*? Or thus: some will say, Though we give but little to the poor, yet, thank God, we have as charitable a heart as any." Nay, says Solomon, *if the clouds be full of rain, they will empty themselves*; if there be charity in the heart, it will show itself, Jam. 2:15, 16. He that *draws out his soul to the hungry* will reach forth his hand to them, as he has ability.

2. Some will say that their sphere of usefulness is low and narrow; they cannot do the good that they see others can, who are in more public stations, and therefore they will sit still and do nothing. Nay, says he, *in the place where the tree falls*, or happens to be, *there it shall be*, for the benefit of those to whom it belongs; every man must labour to be a blessing to that place, whatever it is, where the providence of God casts him; wherever we are we may find good work to do if we have but hearts to do it. Or thus: some will say, "Many present themselves as objects of charity who are unworthy, and I do not know whom it is fit to give it to." "Trouble not thyself about that" (says Solomon); "give as discreetly as thou canst, and then be satisfied that, though the person should prove undeserving of thy charity, yet, if thou give it with an honest heart, thou shalt not lose thy reward; which way soever the charity is directed, *north or south*, thine shall be the benefit of it." This is commonly applied to

death; *therefore* let us do good, and, as good trees, *bring forth the fruits of righteousness*, because death will shortly come and cut us down, and we shall then be determined to an unchangeable state of happiness or misery according to what was done in the body. As the tree falls at death, so it is likely to lie to all eternity.

3. Some will object the many discouragements they have met with in their charity. They have been reproached for it as proud and pharisaical; they have but little to give, and they shall be despised if they do not give as others do; they know not but their children may come to want it, and they had better lay it up for them; they have taxes to pay and purchases to make; they know not what use will be made of their charity, nor what construction will be put upon it; these, and a hundred such objections, he answers, in one word (v. 4): *He that observes the wind shall not sow*, which signifies doing good; *and he that regards the clouds shall not reap*, which signifies getting good. If we stand thus magnifying every little difficulty and making the worst of it, starting objections and fancying hardship and danger where there is none, we shall never go on, much less go through with our work, nor make any thing of it. If the husbandman should decline, or leave off, sowing for the sake of every flying cloud, and reaping for the sake of every blast of wind, he would make but an ill account of his husbandry at the year's end. the duties of religion are as necessary as sowing and reaping, and will turn as much to our own advantage. The discouragements we meet with in these duties are but as winds and clouds, which will do us no harm, and which those that put on a little courage and resolution will despise and easily break through. Note, Those that will be deterred and driven off by small and seeming difficulties from great and real duties will never bring any thing to pass in religion, for there will always arise some wind, some cloud or other, at least in our imagination, to discourage us. Winds and clouds are in God's hands, are designed to try us, and our Christianity obliges us to endure hardness.

4. Some will say, "We do not see in which way what we expend in charity should ever be made up to us; we do not find ourselves ever the richer; why should we depend upon the general promise of a blessing on the charitable, unless we saw which way to expect the operation of it?" To this he answers, "*Thou knowest not the work of God*, nor is it fit thou shouldst. Thou mayest be sure he will make good his word of promise, though he does not tell thee how, or which way, and though he works in a way by himself, according to the counsels of his unsearchable wisdom. He will work, and none shall hinder; but then he will work and none shall direct or prescribe to him. The blessing shall work insensibly but irresistibly. God's work shall certainly agree with his word, whether we see it or no." Our ignorance of the work of God he shows, in two instances:— (1.) *We know not what is the way of the Spirit, of the wind* (so some), *we know not whence it comes, or whither it goes*, or when it will turn; yet the seamen lie ready waiting for it, till it turns about in favour of them; so we must do our duty, in expectation of the time appointed for the blessing. Or it may be understood of the human soul; we know that God made us, and gave us these souls, but how they entered into these bodies, are united to them, animate them, and operate upon them, we know not; the soul is a mystery to itself, no marvel then that *the work of God* is so to us. (2.) *We know not how the bones are fashioned in the womb of her that is with child*. We cannot describe the manner either of the formation of the body or of its information with a soul; both, we know, are *the work of God*, and we acquiesce in his work, but cannot, in either, trace the process of the operation. We doubt not of the birth of the child that is conceived, though we know not how it is formed; nor

need we doubt of the performance of the promise, though we perceive not how things work towards it. And we may well trust God to provide for us that which is convenient, without our anxious disquieting cares, and therein to recompense us for our charity, since it was without any knowledge or forecast of ours that our bodies were curiously wrought in secret and our souls found the way into them; and so the argument is the same, and urged to the same intent, with that of our Saviour (Mt. 6:25), *The life, the living soul that God has given us, is more than meat; the body, that God has made us, is more than raiment; let him therefore that has done the greater for us be cheerfully depended upon to do the less.*

5. Some say, "We have been charitable, have given a great deal to the poor, and never yet saw any return for it; many days are past, and we have not *found it again*," to which he answers (v. 6), "Yet go on, proceed and persevere in well-doing; let slip no opportunity. *In the morning sow thy seed* upon the objects of charity that offer themselves early, *and in the evening do not withhold thy hand*, under pretence that thou art weary; as thou hast opportunity, be doing good, some way or other, all the day long, as the husbandman follows his seedness from morning till night. *In the morning* of youth lay out thyself to do good; give out of the little thou hast to begin the world with; *and in the evening* of old age yield not to the common temptation old people are in to be penurious; even then *withhold not thy hand*, and think not to excuse thyself from charitable works by purposing to make a charitable will, but do good to the last, *for thou knowest not* which work of charity and piety *shall prosper*, both as to others and as to thyself, *this or that*, but hast reason to hope that *both shall be alike good. Be not weary of well-doing, for in due season*, in God's time and that is the best time, *you shall reap*," Gal. 6:9. This is applicable to spiritual charity, our pious endeavours for the good of the souls of others; let us continue them, for, though we have long laboured in vain, we may at length see the success of them. Let ministers, in the days of their seedness, sow both morning and evening; *for who* can tell *which shall prosper?*

#### **Verses 7-10**

Here is an admonition both to old people and to young people, to think of dying, and get ready for it. Having by many excellent precepts taught us how to live well, the preacher comes now, towards the close of his discourse, to teach us how to die well and to put us in mind of our latter end.

I. He applies himself to the aged, writes to them as fathers, to awaken them to think of death, v. 7, 8. Here is, 1. A rational concession of the sweetness of life, which old people find by experience: *Truly the light is sweet*; the light of *the sun* is so; it is *a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold* it. Light was the first thing made in the formation of the great world, as the eye is one of the first in the formation of the body, the little world. It is pleasant to see the light; the heathen were so charmed with the pleasure of it that they worshipped the sun. It is pleasant by it to see other things, the many agreeable prospects this world gives us. The light of life is so. Light is put for life, Job 3:20, 23. It cannot be denied that life is sweet. It is sweet to bad men because they have *their portion in this life*; it is sweet to good men because they have this life as the time of their preparation for a better life; it is sweet to all men; nature says it is so, and there is no disputing against it; nor can death be desired for its own sake, but dreaded, unless as a period to present evils or a passage to future good. Life is sweet, and therefore we have need to double a guard upon ourselves, lest we love it too well. 2. A caution to think of death, even in the midst of life, and of life

when it is most sweet and we are most apt to forget death: *If a man live many years, yet let him remember the days of darkness* are coming. Here is, (1.) A summer's day supposed to be enjoyed—that life may continue long, even many years, and that, by the goodness of God, it may be made comfortable and a man may *rejoice in them all*. There are those that *live many years* in this world, escape many dangers, receive many mercies, and therefore are secure that they shall want no good, and that no evil shall befall them, that the pitcher which has come so often from the well safe and sound shall never come home broken. But who are those that *live many years and rejoice in them all*? Alas! none; we have but hours of joy for months of sorrow. However, some rejoice in their years, their many years, more than others; if these two things meet, a prosperous state and a cheerful spirit, these two indeed may do much towards enabling a man to *rejoice in them all*, and yet the most prosperous state has its alloys and the most cheerful spirit has its damps; jovial sinners have their melancholy qualms, and cheerful saints have their gracious sorrows; so that it is but a supposition, not a case in fact, that a man should *live many years and rejoice in them all*. But, (2.) Here is a winter's night proposed to be expected after this summer's day: *Yet let this hearty old man remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many*. Note, [1.] There are *days of darkness* coming, the days of our lying in the grave; there the body will lie in the dark; there the eyes see not, the sun shines not. The darkness of death is opposed to the light of life; the grave is a *land of darkness*, Job 10:21. [2.] Those *days of darkness* will be many; the days of our lying under ground will be more than the days of our living above ground. They are many, but they are not infinite; many as they are, they will be numbered and finished when *the heavens are no more*, Job 14:12. As the longest day will have its night, so the longest night will have its morning. [3.] It is good for us often to remember those *days of darkness*, that we may not be lifted up with pride, nor lulled asleep in carnal security, nor even transported into indecencies by vain mirth. [4.] Notwithstanding the long continuance of life, and the many comforts of it, *yet* we must *remember the days of darkness*, because those will certainly come, and they will come with much the less terror if we have thought of them before.

II. He applies himself to the young, and writes to them as children, to awaken them to think of death (v. 9, 10); here we have, 1. An ironical concession to the vanities and pleasures of youth: *Rejoice, O young man! in thy youth*. Some make this to be the counsel which the atheist and the epicure give to the young man, the poisonous suggestions against which Solomon, in the close of the verse, prescribes a powerful antidote. But it is more emphatic if we take it, as it is commonly understood, by way of irony, like that of Elijah to the priests of Baal (*Cry aloud, for he is a god*), or of Micaiah to Ahab (*Go to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper*), or of Christ to his disciples, *Sleep on now. "Rejoice, O young man! in thy youth, live a merry life, follow thy sports, and take thy pleasures; let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, cheer thee with its fancies and foolish hopes; entertain thyself with thy pleasing dreams; walk in the ways of thy heart; do whatever thou hast a mind to do, and stick at nothing that may gratify the sensual appetite. Quic—quid libet, licet—Make thy will thy law. Walk in the ways of thy heart, and let thy heart walk after thy eyes, a rambling heart after a roving eye; what is pleasing in thy own eyes do it, whether it be pleasing in the eyes of God or no."* Solomon speaks thus ironically to the young man to intimate, (1.) That this is that which he would do, and which he would fain have leave to do, in which he places his happiness and on which he sets his heart. (2.) That he wishes all about him would give him this counsel, would prophesy to him such smooth things as these, and cannot brook

any advice to the contrary, but reckons those his enemies that bid him be sober and serious. (3.) To expose his folly, and the great absurdity of a voluptuous vicious course of life. The very description of it, if men would see things entirely, and judge of them impartially, is enough to show how contrary to reason those act that live such a life. The very opening of the cause is enough to determine it, without any argument. (4.) To show that if men give themselves to such a course of life as this it is just with God to give them up to it, to abandon them to their own heart's lusts, that they may *walk in their own counsels*, Hos. 4:7.

2. A powerful check given to these vanities and pleasures: "*Know thou that for all these things God shall bring thee into judgment*, and duly consider that, and then live such a luxurious life if thou canst, if thou darest." This is a *kolasteurion*—a *corrective* to the foregoing concession, and plucks in the reins he had laid on the neck of the young man's lust. "*Know then*, for a certainty, that, if thou dost take such a liberty as this, it will be thy everlasting ruin; thou hast to do with a God who will not let it go unpunished." Note, (1.) There is a judgment to come. (2.) We must every one of us be brought into judgment, however we may now put far from us that evil day. (3.) We shall be reckoned with for all our carnal mirth and sensual pleasures in that day. (4.) It is good for all, but especially for young people, to know and consider this, that they may not, by the indulgence of their youthful lusts, *treasure up unto themselves wrath against that day of wrath*, the wrath of the Lamb.

3. A word of caution and exhortation inferred from all this, v. 10. Let young people look to themselves and manage well both their souls and their bodies, their heart and their flesh. (1.) Let them take care that their minds be not lifted up with pride, nor disturbed with anger, or any sinful passion: *Remove sorrow*, or anger, *from thy heart*; the word signifies any disorder or perturbation of the mind. Young people are apt to be impatient of check and control, to vex and fret at any thing that is humbling and mortifying to them, and their proud hearts rise against every thing that crosses and contradicts them. They are so set upon that which is pleasing to sense that they cannot bear any thing that is displeasing, but it goes with sorrow to their heart. Their pride often disquiets them, and makes them uneasy. "Put that away, and the love of the world, and lay thy expectations low from the creature, and then disappointments will not be occasions of sorrow and anger to thee." Some by sorrow here understand that carnal mirth described v. 9, the end of which will be bitterness and sorrow. Let them keep at a distance from every thing which will be sorrow in the reflection. (2.) Let them take care that their bodies be not defiled by intemperance, uncleanness, or any fleshly lusts: "*Put away evil from the flesh*, and let not the members of thy body be instruments of unrighteousness. The evil of sin will be the evil of punishment, and that which thou art fond of, as good for the flesh, because it gratifies the appetites of it, will prove evil, and hurtful to it, and therefore put it far from thee, the further the better."

III. The preacher, to enforce his admonition both to old and young, urges, as an effectual argument, that which is the great argument of his discourse, the vanity of all present things, their uncertainty and insufficiency. 1. He reminds old people of this (v. 8): *All that comes is vanity*; yea, though *a man live many years and rejoice in them all*, All that has come already, and all that is yet to come, how much soever men promise themselves from the concluding scenes, it is all *vanity*. What will be will do no more to make men happy than what has been. *All that come* into the world are *vanity*; they are altogether so, at their best estate. 2. He reminds young people of this: *Childhood and youth are vanity*. The dispositions and actions of childhood and

youth have in them a great deal of impertinence and iniquity, sinful vanity, which young people have need to watch against and get cured. The pleasures and advantages of childhood and youth have in them no certainty, satisfaction, nor continuance. They are passing away; these flowers will soon wither, and these blossoms fall; let them therefore be knit into good fruit, which will continue and abound to a good account.

## Chapter 12

The wise and penitent preacher is here closing his sermon; and he closes it, not only like a good orator, but like a good preacher, with that which was likely to make the best impressions and which he wished might be powerful and lasting upon his hearers. Here is, I. An exhortation to young people to begin betimes to be religious and not to put it off to old age (v. 1), enforced with arguments taken from the calamities of old age (v. 1-5). and the great change that death will make upon us (v. 6, 7). II. A repetition of the great truth he had undertaken to prove in this discourse, the vanity of the world (v. 8). III. A confirmation and recommendation of what he had written in this and his other books, as worthy to be duly weighed and concluded, with a charge to all to be truly religious, in consideration of the judgment to come (v. 13, 14).

### Verses 1-7

Here is, I. A call to young people to think of God, and mind their duty to him, when they are young: *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* This is, 1. The royal preacher's application of his sermon concerning the vanity of the world and every thing in it. "You that are young flatter yourselves with expectations of great things from it, but believe those that have tried it; it yields no solid satisfaction to a soul; therefore, that you may not be deceived by this vanity, nor too much disturbed by it, *remember your Creator*, and so guard yourselves against the mischiefs that arise from the vanity of the creature." 2. It is the royal physician's antidote against the particular diseases of youth, the love of mirth, and the indulgence of sensual pleasures, the vanity which childhood and youth are subject to; to prevent and cure this, *remember thy Creator.* Here is, (1.) A great duty pressed upon us, to *remember* God as our *creator*, not only to remember that God is our Creator, that he *made us and not we ourselves*, and is therefore our rightful Lord and owner, but we must engage ourselves to him with the considerations which his being our Creator lay us under, and pay him the honour and duty which we owe him as our Creator. *Remember thy Creators*; the word is plural, as it is Job 35:10, *Where is God my Makers?* For God said, *Let us make man*, us, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (2.) The proper season for this duty—*in the days of thy youth*, the *days of thy choice* (so some), thy choice days, thy choosing days. "Begin in the beginning of thy days to remember him from whom thou hadst thy being, and go on according to that good beginning. Call him to mind when thou art young, and keep him in mind throughout all the days of thy youth, and never forget him. Guard thus against the temptations of youth, and thus improve the advantages of it." II. A reason to enforce this command: *While the evil days come not, and the years of which thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them.*

1. Do it quickly, (1.) "Before sickness and death come. Do it while thou livest, for it will be too late to do it when death has removed thee from this state of trial and probation to that of recompence and retribution." The days of sickness and death are *the days of evil*, terrible to nature, *evil days* indeed to those that have forgotten their Creator. These *evil days* will *come* sooner or later; as yet they *come not*, for God is *long-suffering to us-ward*, and gives us *space to repent*; the continuing of life is but the deferring of death, and, while life is continued and death deferred, it concerns us to prepare, and get the property of death altered, that we may die comfortably. (2.) Before old age comes, which, if death prevent not, will come, and they will be *years*

*of which we shall say, We have no pleasure in them,*—when we shall not relish the delights of sense, as Barzillai (2 Sa. 19:35),—when we shall be loaded with bodily infirmities, old and blind, or old and lame,—when we shall be taken off from our usefulness, and our *strength* shall be *labour and sorrow*,—when we shall either have parted with our relations, and all our old friends, or be afflicted in them and see them weary of us,—when we shall feel ourselves die by inches. These *years draw nigh*, when *all that comes* will be *vanity*, the remaining months all months of vanity, and there will be *no pleasure* but in the reflection of a good life on earth and the expectation of a better life in heaven.

2. These two arguments he enlarges upon in the following verses, only inverting the order, and shows,

(1.) How many are the calamities of old age, and that if we should live to be old, our days will be such as we shall *have no pleasure in*, which is a good reason why we should return to God, and make our peace with him, *in the days of our youth*, and not put it off till we come to be old; for it will be no thanks to us to leave the pleasures of sin when they have left us, nor to return to God when need forces us. It is the greatest absurdity and ingratitude imaginable to give the cream and flower of our days to the devil, and reserve the bran, and refuse, and dregs of them for God; this is offering *the torn, and the lame, and the sick for sacrifice*; and, besides, old age being thus clogged with infirmities, it is the greatest folly imaginable to put off that needful work till then, which requires the best of our strength, when our faculties are in their prime, and especially to make the work more difficult by a longer continuance in sin, and, laying up treasures of guilt in the conscience, to add to the burdens of age and make them much heavier. If the calamities of age will be such as are here represented, we shall have need of something to support and comfort us then, and nothing will be more effectual to do that than the testimony of our consciences for us that we begin betimes to remember our Creator and have not since laid aside the remembrance of him. How can we expect God should help us when we are old, if we will not serve him when we are young? See Ps. 71:17, 18.

[1.] The decays and infirmities of old age are here elegantly described in figurative expressions, which have some difficulty in them to us now, who are not acquainted with the common phrases and metaphors used in Solomon's age and language; but the general scope is plain—to show how uncomfortable, generally, the days of old age are. *First*, Then *the sun and the light* of it, *the moon and the stars*, and the light which they borrow from it, will *be darkened*. They look dim to old people, in consequence of the decay of their sight; their countenance is clouded, and the beauty and lustre of it are eclipsed; their intellectual powers and faculties, which are as lights in the soul, are weakened; their understanding and memory fail them, and their apprehension is not so quick nor their fancy so lively as it has been; the days of their mirth are over (light is often put for joy and prosperity) and they have not the pleasure either of the converse of the day or the repose of the night, for both *the sun and the moon* are darkened to them. *Secondly*, Then *the clouds return after the rain*; as, when the weather is disposed to wet, no sooner has one cloud blown over than another succeeds it, so it is with old people, when they have got free from one pain or ailment, they are seized with another, so that their distempers are *like a continual dropping in a very rainy day*. The end of one trouble is, in this world, but the beginning of another, and deep calls unto deep. Old people are often afflicted with defluxions of rheum, like soaking rain, after which still more clouds return, feeding the humour, so that it is continually grievous, and therein the body, as it were, melts away. *Thirdly*, Then *the keepers of the house tremble*. The head, which is as the watch-

tower, shakes, and the arms and hands, which are ready for the preservation of the body, shake too, and grow feeble, upon every sudden approach and attack of danger. That vigour of the animal spirits which used to be exerted for self-defence fails and cannot do its office; old people are easily dispirited and discouraged. *Fourthly*, Then *the strong men shall bow themselves*; the legs and thighs, which used to support the body, and bear its weight, bend, and cannot serve for travelling as they have done, but are soon tired. Old men that have been in their time *strong men* become weak and stoop for *age*, Zec. 8:4. *God takes no pleasure in the legs of a man* (Ps. 147:10), for their strength will soon fail; but *in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength*; he has everlasting arms. *Fifthly*, Then the *grinders cease because they are few*; the teeth, with which we grind our meat and prepare it for concoction, cease to do their part, *because they are few*. They are rotted and broken, and perhaps have been drawn because they ached. Some old people have lost all their teeth, and others have but few left; and this infirmity is the more considerable because the meat, not being well chewed, for want of teeth, is not well digested, which has as much influence as any thing upon the other decays of age. *Sixthly*, *Those that look out of the windows are darkened*; the eyes wax dim, as Isaac's (Gen. 27:1), and Ahijah's, 1 Ki. 14:4. Moses was a rare instance of one who, when 120 years old, had good eyesight, but ordinarily the sight decays in old people as soon as any thing, and it is a mercy to them that art helps nature with spectacles. We have need to improve our sight well while we have it, because the light of the eyes may be gone before the light of life. *Seventhly*, *The doors are shut in the streets*. Old people keep within doors, and care not for going abroad to entertainments. The lips, the doors of the mouth, are shut in eating, because the teeth are gone and *the sound of the grinding with them is low*, so that they have not that command of their meat in their mouths which they used to have; they cannot digest their meat, and therefore little grist is brought to the mill. *Eighthly*, Old people *rise up at the voice of the bird*. They have no sound sleep as young people have, but a little thing disturbs them, even the chirping of a bird; they cannot rest for coughing, and therefore rise up at cock-crowing, as soon as any body is stirring; or they are apt to be jealous, and timorous, and full of care, which breaks their sleep and makes them rise early; or they are apt to be superstitious, and *rise up* as in a fright, *at those voices of birds*, as of ravens, or screech-owls, which soothsayers call ominous. *Ninthly*, With them *all the daughters of music are brought low*. They have neither voice nor ear, can neither sing themselves nor take any pleasure, as Solomon had done in the days of his youth, in *singing men, and singing women, and musical instruments*, ch. 2:8. Old people grow hard of hearing, and unapt to distinguish sounds and voices. *Tenthly*, They are *afraid of that which is high*, afraid to go to the top of any high place, either because, for want of breath, they cannot reach it, or, their heads being giddy or their legs failing them, they dare not venture to it, or they frighten themselves with fancying that *that which is high* will fall upon them. *Fear is in the way*; they can neither ride nor walk with their former boldness, but are afraid of every thing that lies in their way, lest it throw them down. *Eleventhly*, *The almond-tree flourishes*. The old man's hair has grown white, so that his head looks like an almond-tree in the blossom. The almond-tree blossoms before any other tree, and therefore fitly shows what haste old age makes in seizing upon men; it prevents their expectations and comes faster upon them than they thought of. Gray hairs are here and there upon them, and they perceive it not. *Twelfthly*, *The grasshopper is a burden and desire fails*. Old men can bear nothing; the lightest thing sits heavily upon them, both on their bodies and on their minds, a little thing sinks and breaks them. Perhaps *the*

*grasshopper* was some food that was looked upon to be very light of digestion (John Baptist's meat was *locusts*), but even that lies heavily upon an old man's stomach, and therefore *desire fails*, he has no appetite to his meat, neither shall he *regard the desire of woman*, as that king, Dan. 11:37. Old men become mindless and listless, and the pleasures of sense are to them tasteless and sapless.

[2.] It is probable that Solomon wrote this when he was himself old, and could speak feelingly of the infirmities of age, which perhaps grew the faster upon him for the indulgence he had given himself in sensual pleasures. Some old people bear up better than others under the decays of age, but, more or less, the days of old age are and will be *evil days* and of little pleasure. Great care therefore should be taken to pay respect and honour to old people, that they may have something to balance these grievances and nothing may be done to add to them. And all this, put together, makes up a good reason why we should *remember our Creator in the days of our youth*, that he may remember us with favour when these *evil days come*, and his comforts may delight our souls when the delights of sense are in a manner worn off.

(2.) He shows how great a change death will make with us, which will be either the prevention or the period of the miseries of old age. Nothing else will keep them off, nor any thing else cure them. "Therefore *remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, because death is certainly before thee, perhaps it is very near thee, and it is a serious thing to die, and thou shouldst feel concerned with the utmost care and diligence to prepare for it." [1.] Death will fix us in an unchangeable state: *Man* shall then *go to his long home*, and all these infirmities and decays of age are harbingers of and advances towards that awful remove. At death *man goes* from this world and all the employments and enjoyments of it. He has gone for good and all, as to his present state. He has gone *home*, for here he was a stranger and pilgrim; both soul and body go to the place whence they came, v. 7. He has gone to his rest, to the place where he is to fix. He has gone *to his home, to the house of his world* (so some), for this world is not his. He has gone *to his long home*, for the days of his lying in the grave will be many. He has gone *to his house of eternity*, not only to his house whence he shall never return to this world, but to the house where he must be for ever. This should make us willing to die, that, at death, we must *go home*; and why should we not long to go to our Father's house? And this should quicken us to get ready to die, that we must then go to our *long home*, to an *everlasting habitation*. [2.] Death will be an occasion of sorrow to our friends that love us. When *man goes to his long home the mourners go about the streets*—the real mourners, and those, as now with us, distinguished by their habits as they go along the streets,—the mourners for ceremony, that were hired to weep for the dead, both to express and to excite the real mourning. When we die we not only remove to a melancholy house before us, but we leave a melancholy house behind us. Tears are a tribute due to the dead, and this, among other circumstances, makes it a serious thing to die. But in vain do we *go to the house of mourning*, and see *the mourners go about the streets*, if it do not help to make us serious and pious mourners in the closet. [3.] Death will dissolve the frame of nature and take down the earthly house of this tabernacle, which is elegantly described, v. 6. Then shall *the silver cord*, by which soul and body were wonderfully fastened together, *be loosed*, that sacred knot untied, and those old friends be forced to part; then shall *the golden bowl*, which held the waters of life for us, *be broken*; then shall *the pitcher* with which we used to fetch up water, for the constant support of life and the repair of its decays, *be broken*, even *at the fountain*, so that it can

fetch up no more; and *the wheel* (all those organs that serve for the collecting and distributing of nourishment) shall be *broken*, and disabled to do their office any more. The body shall become like a watch when the spring is broken, the motion of all the wheels is stopped and they all stand still; the machine is taken to pieces; the heart beats no more, nor does the blood circulate. Some apply this to the ornaments and utensils of life; rich people must, at death, leave behind them their clothing and furniture of *silver* and *gold*, and poor people their earthen *pitchers*, and the drawers of water will have their *wheel broken*. [4.] Death will resolve us into our first principles, v. 7. Man is a strange sort of creature, a ray of heaven united to a clod of earth; at death these are separated, and each goes to the place whence it came. *First*, The body, that clod of clay, *returns to* its own *earth*. It is made of *the earth*; Adam's body was so, and we are of the same mould; it is a house of clay. At death it is laid in *the earth*, and in a little time will be resolved into earth, not to be distinguished from common earth, according to the sentence (Gen. 3:19), *Dust thou art and therefore to dust thou shalt return*. Let us not therefore indulge the appetites of the body, nor pamper it (it will be worms' meat shortly), nor let *sin reign in our mortal bodies*, for they are mortal, Rom. 6:12. *Secondly*, The soul, that beam of light, *returns to* that *God* who, when he *made man of the dust of the ground, breathed into him the breath of life*, to make him *a living soul* (Gen. 2:7), and forms the spirit of every man within him. When the fire consumes the wood the flame ascends, and the ashes *return to the earth* out of which the wood grew. The soul does not die with the body; it is *redeemed from the power of the grave* (Ps. 49:15); it can subsist without it and will in a state of separation from it, as the candle burns, and burns brighter, when it is taken out of the dark lantern. It removes to the world of spirits, to which it is allied. It goes *to God* as a Judge, to give account of itself, and to be lodged either with *the spirits in prison* (1 Pt. 3:19) or with *the spirits in paradise* (Lu. 23:43), according to what was done in the body. This makes death terrible to the wicked, whose souls go to God as an avenger, and comfortable to the godly, whose souls go to God as a Father, into whose hands they cheerfully commit them, through a Mediator, out of whom sinners may justly dread to think of going *to God*.

### Verses 8-12

Solomon is here drawing towards a close, and is loth to part till he has gained his point, and prevailed with his hearers, with his readers, to seek for that satisfaction in God only and in their duty to him which they can never find in the creature.

I. He repeats his text (v. 8), 1. As that which he had fully demonstrated the truth of, and so made good his undertaking in this sermon, wherein he had kept closely to his text, and both his reasons and his application were to the purpose. 2. As that which he desired to inculcate both upon others and upon himself, to have it ready, and to make use of it upon all occasions. We see it daily proved; let it therefore be daily improved: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*.

II. He recommends what he had written upon this subject by divine direction and inspiration to our serious consideration. The words of this book are faithful, and well worthy our acceptance, for,

1. They are the words of one that was a convert, a penitent, that could speak by dear-bought experience of the vanity of the world and the folly of expecting great things from it. He was *Cohemoth*, one gathered in from his wanderings and gathered home to that God from whom he had revolted. *Vanity of vanities, saith the penitent*. All true penitents are convinced of the vanity of the world, for they find it can do nothing to ease them of the burden of sin, which they complain of.

2. They are the words of one that was wise, wiser than any, endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom, famous for it among his neighbours, who all sought unto him *to hear his wisdom*, and therefore a competent judge of this matter, not only wise as a prince, but wise as a preacher—and preachers have need of wisdom to win souls.

3. He was one that made it his business to do good, and to use wisdom aright. *Because* he *was* himself *wise*, but knew he had not his wisdom for himself, any more than he had it from himself, *he still taught the people* that *knowledge* which he had found useful to himself, and hoped might be so to them too. It is the interest of princes to have their people well taught in religion, and no disparagement to them to teach them themselves *the good knowledge of the Lord*, but their duty to encourage those whose office it is to teach them and to speak comfortably to them, 2 Chr. 30:22. Let not the people, the common people, be despised, no, not by the wisest and greatest, as either unworthy or incapable of good knowledge: even those that are well taught have need to be *still taught*, that they may grow in knowledge.

4. He took a great deal of pains and care to do good, designing to *teach the people knowledge*. He did not put them off with any thing that came next to hand, because they were inferior people, and he a very wise man, but considering the worth of the souls he preached to and the weight of the subject he preached on, he *gave good heed* to what he read and heard from others, that, having stocked himself well, he might *bring out of his treasury things new and old*. He *gave good heed* to what he spoke and wrote himself, and was choice and exact in it; all he did was elaborate. (1.) He chose the most profitable way of preaching, by proverbs or short sentences, which would be more easily apprehended and remembered than long and laboured periods. (2.) He did not content himself with a few parables, or wise sayings, and repeat them again and again, but he furnished himself with *many proverbs*, a great variety of grave discourses, that he might have something to say on every occasion. (3.) He did not only give them such observations as were obvious and trite, but he *sought out* such as were surprising and uncommon; he dug into the mines of knowledge, and did not merely pick up what lay on the surface. (4.) He did not deliver his heads and observations at random, as they came to mind, but methodized them, and *set them in order* that they might appear in more strength and lustre.

5. He put what he had to say in such a dress as he thought would be most pleasing: *He sought to find out acceptable words*, words of delight (v. 10); he took care that good matter might not be spoiled by a bad style, and by the ungratefulness and incongruity of the expression. Ministers should study, not for the big words, nor the fine words, but *acceptable words*, such as are likely to please men for their good, to edification, 1 Co. 10:33. Those that would win souls must contrive how to win upon them with *words fitly spoken*.

6. That which he wrote for our instruction is of unquestionable certainty, and what we may rely upon: *That which was written was upright* and sincere, according to the real sentiments of the penman, even *words of truth*, the exact representation of the thing as it is. Those are sure not to miss their way who are guided by these words. What good will *acceptable words* do us if they be not *upright and words of truth*? Most are for smooth things, that flatter them, rather than right things, that direct them (Isa. 30:10), but to those that understand themselves, and their own interest, *words of truth* will always be *acceptable words*.

7. That which he and other holy men wrote will be of great use and advantage to us, especially being inculcated upon us by the

exposition of it, v. 11. Here observe, (1.) A double benefit accruing to us from divine truths if duly applied and improved; they are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness*. They are of use, [1.] To excite us to our duty. They are as goads to the ox that draws the plough, putting him forward when he is dull and quickening him, to amend his pace. The truths of God *prick men to the heart* (Acts 2:37) and put them upon bethinking themselves, when they trifle and grow remiss, and exerting themselves with more vigour in their work. While our good affections are so apt as they are to grow flat and cool, we have need of these *goads*. [2.] To engage us to persevere in our duty. They are *as nails* to those that are wavering and inconstant, to fix them to that which is good. They are *as goads* to such as are dull and draw back, and *nails* to such as are desultory and draw aside, means to establish the heart and confirm good resolutions, that we may not sit loose to our duty, nor even be taken off from it, but that what good there is in us may be *as a nail fastened in a sure place*, Ezra 9:8. (2.) A double way of communicating divine truths, in order to those benefits:—[1.] By the scriptures, as the standing rule, the *words of the wise*, that is, of the prophets, who are called *wise men*, Mt. 23:34. These we have in black and white, and may have recourse to them at any time, and make use of them *as goads and as nails*. By them we may teach ourselves; let them but come with pungency and power to the soul, let the impressions of them be deep and durable, and the will *make us wise to salvation*. [2.] By the ministry. To make the *words of the wise* more profitable to us, it is appointed that they should be impressed and fastened by the *masters of assemblies*. Solemn assemblies for religious worship are an ancient divine institution, intended for the honour of God and the edification of his church, and are not only serviceable, but necessary, to those ends. There must be masters of these assemblies, who are Christ's ministers, and as such are to preside in them, to be God's mouth to the people and theirs to God. Their business is to fasten the *words of the wise*, and drive them as *nails* to the head, in order to which the word of God is likewise as *a hammer*, Jer. 23:29.

8. That which is written, and thus recommended to us, is of divine origin. Though it comes to us through various hands (many *wise men*, and many *masters of assemblies*), yet it is *given by one* and the same *shepherd*, the *great shepherd of Israel, that leads Joseph like a flock*, Ps. 80:1. God is that one Shepherd, whose good Spirit indited the scriptures, and assists the *masters of the assemblies* in opening and applying the scriptures. *These words of the wise* are the true sayings of God, on which we may rest our souls. From that one Shepherd all ministers must receive what they deliver, and speak according to the light of the written word.

9. The sacred inspired writings, if we will but make use of them, are sufficient to guide us in the way of true happiness, and we need not, in the pursuit of that, to fatigue ourselves with the search of other writings (v. 12): "*And further, nothing now remains but to tell thee that that of making many books there is no end,*" that is, (1.) Of *writing* many books. "If what I have written, serve not to convince thee of the vanity of the world, and the necessity of being religious, neither wouldst thou be convinced if I should write ever so much." If the end be not attained in the use of those books of scripture which God has blessed us with, neither should we obtain the end, if we had twice as many more; nay, if we had so many that the whole world could not contain them (Jn. 21:25), and much study of them would but confound us, and would rather be *a weariness to the flesh* than any advantage to the soul. We have as much as God saw fit to give us, saw fit for us, and saw us fit for. Much less

can it be expected that those who will not by these be admonished should be wrought upon by other writings. Let men write ever so many books for the conduct of human life, write till they have tired themselves with much study, they cannot give better instructions than those we have from the word of God. Or, (2.) Of *buying* many books, making ourselves master of them, and masters of what is in them, by much study; still the desire of learning would be unsatisfied. It will give a man indeed the best entertainment and the best accomplishment this world can afford him; but if we be not by these *admonished* of the vanity of the world, and human learning, among other things, and its insufficiency to make us happy without true piety, alas! there is no end of it, nor real benefit by it; it will weary the body, but never give the soul any true satisfaction. The great Mr. Selden subscribed to this when he owned that in all the books he had read he never found that on which he could rest his soul, but in the holy scripture, especially Tit. 2:11, 12. By these therefore let us be admonished.

### **Verses 13-14**

The great enquiry which Solomon prosecutes in this book is, *What is that good which the sons of men should do?* ch. 2:3. What is the true way to true happiness, the certain means to attain our great end? He had in vain sought it among those things which most men are eager in pursuit of, but here, at length, he has found it, by the help of that discovery which God anciently made to man (Job 28:28), that serious godliness is the only way to true happiness: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*, the return entered upon the writ of enquiry, the result of this diligent search; you shall have all I have been driving at in two words. He does not say, *Do you hear it*, but *Let us hear it*; for preachers must themselves be hearers of that word which they preach to others, must hear it as from God; those are teachers by the halves who teach others and not themselves, Rom. 2:21. Every word of God is pure and precious, but some words are worthy of more special remark, as this; the Masorites begin it with a capital letter, as that Deu. 6:4. Solomon himself puts a *nota bene* before it, demanding attention in these words, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*. Observe here,

I. The summary of religion. Setting aside all matters of doubtful disputation, to be religious is to *fear God and keep his commandments*. 1. The root of religion is fear of God reigning in the heart, and a reverence of his majesty, a deference to his authority, and a dread of his wrath. *Fear God*, that is, worship God, give him the honour due to his name, in all the instances of true devotion, inward and outward. See Rev. 14:7. 2. The rule of religion is the law of God revealed in the scriptures. Our fear towards God must be taught by his commandments (Isa. 29:13), and those we must keep and carefully observe. Wherever the fear of God is uppermost in the heart, there will be a *respect to all his commandments* and care to keep them. In vain do we pretend to fear God if we do not make conscience of our duty to him.

II. The vast importance of it: *This is the whole of man*; it is all his business and all his blessedness; our whole duty is summed up in this and our whole comfort is bound up in this. It is the concern of every man, and ought to be his chief and continual care; it is the common concern of all men, of their whole time. It is nothing to a man whether he be rich or poor, high or low, but it is the main matter, it is all in all to a man, to fear God and do as he bids him.

III. A powerful inducement to this, v. 14. We shall see of what vast consequence it is to us that we be religious if we consider the account we must every one of us shortly give of himself to God; thence he argued against a voluptuous and vicious life (ch.

11:9), and here for a religious life: *God shall bring every work into judgment*. Note, 1. There is a judgment to come, in which every man's eternal state will be finally determined. 2. God himself will be the Judge, God-man will, not only because he has a right to judge, but because he is perfectly fit for it, infinitely wise and just. 3. *Every work* will then be *brought into judgment*, will be enquired into and called over again. It will be a day to *bring to remembrance every thing done in the body*. 4. The great thing to be then judged of concerning *every work* is whether it be good or evil, conformable to the will of God or a violation of it. 5. Even *secret things*, both good and evil, will be brought to light, and brought to account, in the judgment of the great day (Rom. 2:16); there is no good work, no bad work, hid, but shall then be made manifest. 6. In consideration of the judgment to come, and the strictness of that judgment, it highly concerns us now to be very strict in our walking with God, that we may *give up our account with joy*.