

Ecclesiastes – An Outline of the Book in Four Sections

I. The enjoyment of what is good in life under the sun is only possible in God. (1:1-2:26)

- A. Introductory Matters
 - 1. Life under the sun is a series of endless cycles 1:1-11
 - 2. Wisdom concludes there is no solution to sin's corruption of life under the sun 1:12-15
 - 3. The more you know, the more difficult it is under the sun 1:16-18
- B. Life has no joy apart from God
 - 1. There is no true joy in pleasure alone
 - a. There is no joy in cheer (laughter, wine, folly) 2:1-3
 - b. There is no joy in possessions (great works, slaves, stuff) 2:4-7
 - c. There is no joy in entertainment (precious metals, music, women) 2:8-9
 - d. There is no joy in massive abundance of all of these! 2:10-11
 - 2. There is no true joy in wisdom alone
 - a. The wise and the fool both die in the end 2:12-17
 - 3. There is no true joy in working to amass wealth alone
 - a. You may lose it... or your son will! 2:18-23

Conclusion #1: 2:24-26

Life's Problem: "There is not an inherent good in man that he can eat and drink and find joy in his toil – that only comes from God!"

Life's Solution: Illusive joy can only be found when the True Joy (God Himself) gives it to man.

II. Life is nothing but futility and frustration unless you embrace the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. (3:1-5:20)

- A. God's plan embraces all things (3:1-15)
 - 1. Man, plants and states all have a fixed term of life 3:1-3
 - 2. Man can only react to sovereign events 3:4-8
 - 3. All the work in the world cannot change God's plan 3:9
 - 4. Yet this plan is beautiful and God has put it into man's heart to want to figure it out (even though we are incapable of doing it!) 3:10-11

Mini-Conclusion #2 3:12-14

Life's Problem: You cannot plumb the depths of sovereignty!

The Solution: Find joy in the God you fear.

The Sinner's Existence: He vainly tries to thwart a sovereign, beautiful plan. (All the while dying to understand why God is doing what He is doing (:11) and remaining incapable of ever finding true joy!)

- B. Six Proposed Objections to God's Sovereign Plan Being "Beautiful"
 - 1. Unrighteousness is found in the hall of justice
[But God will ultimately judge justly] 3:16-17
 - 2. Man is an animal and dies like one
[But each man will stand before God] 3:18-20

Mini-Conclusion #3 3:21-22

Problem: Man dies just like an animal

Solution: Take joy in your work now in God, for your spirit soon departs to God!

- 3. Oppression reigns throughout the earth
[No answer is given yet to this problem – it is answered later] 4:1-3
- 4. Rivalry drives everything
[Work hard, but live balanced] 4:4-6
- 5. Loneliness is everywhere
[Pursue human friendship] 4:7-12
- 6. Fame is fleeting
[Rely on Him who is eternal] 4:13-16
- C. Two vital warnings to not deny God's sovereignty or impugn His motives (5:1-17)
 - 1. Do not neglect to worship your Creator honestly 5:1-7
 - 2. The existence of God and the existence of evil are not mutually exclusive
 - a. God oversees the oppression of the ruler 5:8-9
 - b. God does not allow money to give joy 5:10-12
 - c. God oversees the "stock market" 5:13-17

Conclusion #4

Solution: Take joy in God for all that he allots you. He gives the power to enjoy! To accept your lot and find joy is a gift and your life will speed along happily.

III. A wise man will learn to look at life with God's wisdom, focusing on obeying God and enjoying the gifts He sovereignly gives and takes away 6:1-8:15

- A. Prosperity is not always a good thing! (6:1-12)
 - 1. If you have great wealth but not ability to find joy in it, it is an evil (:1-6)
 - 2. The ability to work combined with an appetite that is never satisfied is an evil (:7-9)
 - 3. Intelligence with no final answers is an evil (:10-12)
- B. Adversity is not always a bad thing! (7:1-14)
 - 1. Death authenticates the godly and sobers the silly (:1-2)
 - 2. Sorrow brings joy (:3-4)
 - 3. Rebukes make wise (:5-7)
 - 4. Affliction teaches patience and proves wisdom (:8-12)
 - 5. Conclusion: Consider the work of God (:13-14)
- C. Don't interpret sovereignty! Don't assume you know what God is doing based on what's happening in a person's life! What you see outwardly does not necessarily reflect the reality of what is happening internally.
 - 1. Consider... when bad things happen to good people, or good things happen to bad people
 - a. Someone might really have a false righteousness (:16)
 - b. The solution of false righteousness is not to be wicked (:17)
 - c. The solution: fear God (:18-19)
 - 2. Consider.... when people say bad things about the "good" you
 - a. Our hearts are corrupted by sin and what have you said about others? (:20-22)

Conclusion to interpreting sovereignty (:23-29)

 - 1. These are very deep matters 7:23-24
 - 2. Sin is illogical at the core and cannot be explained, even by wisdom! 7:25
 - 3. Flee from the foolish woman (folly) and seek to be wise 7:26-29
- D. Therefore seek to be wise – it brings life ! 8:1
 - 1. Obey Authority 8:2-5
 - 2. Accept hurt and pain 8:6-9
 - 3. Trust in future justice from God 8:10-13

Conclusion #5 (8:15)

Eat, drink and be joyful with all the good that God gives you for all the days God gives you!

IV. Applying these principles – how then should the wise live? 8:16-12:14

- A. They do not permit the mystery of sovereignty to dampen the delight 8:16-9:10
 - 1. Man cannot explain God 8:16-18
 - 2. Man can trust God 9:1a
 - 3. Man cannot predict God 9:1b-3a
 - 4. Man must prepare to meet God 9:3b-6
- Mini-Conclusion #6**
Christian men can delight in God in our food, drink, clothing, work, marriage...
- B. They do not permit the mystery of sovereignty to weaken their pursuit of wisdom 9:11-10:20
 - 1. Human Ability Cannot Guarantee Success – you need wisdom! 9:11-12
 - 2. Wisdom is Priceless: Because it enables deliverances (even when unappreciated)9:13-18
 - 3. Wisdom is Priceless: But be warned! It is easily polluted with folly 10:1-3
 - 4. Wisdom is Priceless: Since it teaches how to live under social injustice (evil rulers or corrupted social categories) 10:4-7
 - 5. Wisdom is Priceless: It can't control calamity, but it can speed your work 10:8-11
 - 6. Wisdom is Priceless: For the fool is consumed by his foolishness 10:12-15
 - 7. Wisdom is Priceless: For it teaches how to live under an evil regime 10:16-20
 - C. They never forget that life is short, the judgment comes quick and God is delightful 11:1-12:14
 - 1. Enjoy your life by giving your stuff away freely and trusting God to supply all you need 11:1-6
 - 2. Enjoy your life and prepare to meet your Maker 11:7-10
 - a. Prepare to meet your Maker while you are still young and able 12:1
 - b. With age comes increased difficulty and eventually death 12:2-8

V. Grand Conclusion

God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. 12:9-14