

I Intro. (Feb. 3, 2007)

Matthew Henry entitles the section, “The little advantage any one has in outward things.”¹ On vs. 7, he adds, “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.”² Essentially what Solomon is saying is that one should be content with what one has (Ecc. 6:7-9).

Vv. 10-12 really begin the second major half of the book, which, according to Dr. Glenn “contains much practical advice on how to live. However, this advice is given in the light of constant reminders of man’s ignorance of the providence of God (i.e., ‘What God has done,’ 7:13; cf. 8:17) and what the future holds (e.g., 9:1; 10:14; 11:2). This advice is intended to encourage people to fear God (7:18; 8:12; 12:13) and lead lives that please Him (7:26; cf. 2:26).”³ In our immediate section, Solomon emphasizes the sovereign decree of God, namely, that He has planned everything. This plan cannot ultimately be changed, and man really cannot know the decree in this life. It really is that simple.

II Be Content, God is in Control (Ecc. 6:7-12).

A. Be content (6:7-9).

1. (vs. 7) “Solomon concluded his description of the tragedy of unenjoyed wealth with a recommendation that one be content with what he has.”⁴ Apparently the expression, “All a man’s (perhaps ‘the man’⁵ of the previous section) labor is for his mouth,” is a description of the normal course of human events in that it is perfectly normal and right for a man to go out and diligently earn a living to meet his and his family’s basic physical needs.

Solomon added, “yet the appetite (שֶׁפֶּה נֶפֶשׁ [neh’-fesh] - “soul”⁶) is not satisfied,” lit., “*be filled* (and so to) *be satisfied*.”⁷ If he were content with this, that would be excellent, but very often he is not satisfied. “The more his income

rises, the more he wants to buy. Contentment is the carrot on the stick that forever eludes him.”⁸ This is futility in action because “A little will serve to sustain us comfortably and a great deal can do no more.”⁹ What about something “for the head and heart, (something) to nourish or enrich the soul”¹⁰? “Especially in Ecclesiastes, the soul ‘craves, lacks.’”¹¹ “Soul” here really stands for the whole person. We should calm the cravings of the soul by feeding it that which satisfies. In quoting Deut. 8:3, Jesus said, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Only that will satisfy the deepest longings of men’s souls. The heaping ever higher of material possessions will never do it, but will lead instead to ever deepening and hopeless longings. “The insatiability of the desire prevents that which is the only end proposed in toils, namely, self-gratification; ‘the man’ thus gets no ‘good’ out of his wealth (Ec 6:3).”¹² Jesus said, “for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Lk. 12:15b).

2. (vs. 8) This rhetorical question was answered in Ecc. 2:14-15. Even if the “wise man” does not make the mistake of allowing his “appetite” to overcome his allotted resources, in the end, to what benefit is it for him that this is the case? In reality, he has no “advantage” whatever, that is, not in relation to having discovered any “real advantage or the true excellence in life,”¹³ so that life can be said to offer ultimate purpose with no sense of the evanescence of futility or vanity. Wisdom, as we have seen, offers a relative advantage (Ecc. 7:10b-12a). “And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness” (Ecc. 2:13). However, wisdom will not bring final meaning to life viewed merely from “under the sun.” “Prov points out there is advantage in toil over laziness (Prov 14:23). But Eccl probes deeper by continually asking what profit does one gain from his toil (Eccl 1:3; 3:9). The answer is nothing, especially if it is to accumulate goods

¹Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997). Ec 6:1.

²Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary : On the Whole Bible, electronic ed. of the complete and unabridged edition. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991). Ec 6:7.

³John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985). 991.

⁴John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985). 990.

⁵Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset, David Brown and David Brown, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). Ec 6:7.

⁶R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980). 588.

⁷Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs. Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. electronic ed. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000. 570.

⁸William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995). Ec 6:7.

⁹Henry, Matthew. Matthew Henry's Commentary : On the Whole Bible. electronic ed. of the complete and unabridged edition. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991. Ec 6:7.

¹⁰Henry, Matthew. Matthew Henry's Commentary : On the Whole Bible. electronic ed. of the complete and unabridged edition. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991. Ec 6:7.

¹¹R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980). 588.

¹²Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset, David Brown and David Brown, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). Ec 6:7.

¹³Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980. 420.

which cannot be taken at death (Eccl 2:11; 5:15).”¹⁴

A further rhetorical question ensues: “What *advantage* does the poor man have, knowing *how* to walk before the living?” The answer again has to be that it is ultimately no advantage to him at all insofar as finding lasting meaning to “life under the sun.” “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.”¹⁵ To this, regarding the poor man’s finding of ultimate purpose in this life, Solomon would say, “So what?” He has found nothing of the kind, and he will not either. The poor man has no advantage over the rich man in this regard, though many godly minded people would tend to say that he does.

3. (vs. 9) Solomon concludes that “What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires.” “A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush” we might say. “The enjoyment of what we have cannot but be acknowledged more rational than a greedy grasping at more...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,”¹⁶ as we saw in the intro. We will not find ultimate fulfillment in the things of this life only, but it is better to be content with what one has than discontent that one has not. It is the latter that is “futility and a striving after wind.” Dr. Glenn says, “constantly longing for more is futile or meaningless, a chasing after the wind. This is the last of nine occurrences in Ecclesiastes of the phrase ‘chasing after the wind’ (cf. 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16).”¹⁷ Are you content with what you can see, i.e., what you have, or are you striving or chasing after wind? Where is your heart (or soul) today?

B. God is in control (Ecc. 6:10-12).

1. (vs. 10) Here we come again to certain matters that have already been touched on in Ecc. They are “the immutability (1:15; 3:14; cf. 1:9) and inscrutability (3:11, 22) of divine

providence.”¹⁸ The expression, “whatever exists has already been named,” apparently means “created” (Is. 40:26), and “and it is known what man (‘*Hebrew*, “Adam,” equivalent to man “of *red* dust,” as his Creator appropriately named him from his frailty.’¹⁹) is” implies that man has been “set apart” or “appointed” (cf. Jer. 1:5). Also, “In the ancient world people recognized that the person who named someone or something was sovereign over it. Thus God ‘called’ what he had created day, heaven, man, etc.; and Adam named the woman, the animals, etc. Solomon’s point in verse 10 is that God has sovereignly decreed the nature and essence of everything that exists.”²⁰ No one can fundamentally alter either creation itself or a man’s appointed position in it. For man to suppose that he could change such would be “for” him to “dispute with him,” God, “who is stronger than he is.” So in connection with the previous section, “Our lot is appointed. We have what pleases God, and let that please us.”²¹

Consequently, man is not in a position “dispute with him who is stronger than he is,” that is, God. In Rm. 9:20, Paul said, “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?”

2. (vs. 11) “For,” Solomon explained further, the fact that man really “cannot dispute with” God must mean that “there are many words which increase futility” (See Ecc. 10:12-14). There is no end to these streams of empty rhetoric and rebellion as men rise up and say this and that, usually having something to do with unrelieved suffering in the world, to prove that God does not exist, or that He is a tyrant, or that He is impotent. These charges change nothing either on earth or in heaven. God’s plan will be realized no matter what man may say. So as Solomon said, these words only serve to “increase futility,” or meaninglessness, senselessness and vacuity, and so to make matters even worse. The question naturally follows, “What *then* is the advantage to a man?” The answer is that there is

14R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980). 420.

15Henry, Matthew. Matthew Henry's Commentary : On the Whole Bible. electronic ed. of the complete and unabridged edition. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991. Ec 6:7.

16Henry, Matthew. Matthew Henry's Commentary : On the Whole Bible. electronic ed. of the complete and unabridged edition. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991. Ec 6:7.

17John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985). 991.

18Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 991.

19Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset, David Brown and David Brown, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). Ec 6:10.

20Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 5:18.

21Henry, Matthew and Thomas Scott. Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997. Ec 6:7.

none. Contending with God via a stream of cantankerous verbiage will not result in meaning. Indeed, it will bring about judgment instead, something not stated here.

3. (vs. 12) This is yet another rhetorical question: “For who knows what is good for a man during *his* lifetime, *during* the few years of his futile life?” Of course, the obvious answer is “no one.” Man’s life is “empty”²² and “transitory.”²³ “He,” man, “will spend them,” his few years, “like a shadow.” The term “shadow” “serves as a negative metaphor when it is viewed as ephemeral and fleeting. Man’s life is compared to a shadow, for it has no permanence and flees quickly away (I Chr 29:15).”²⁴ In his above disputing with God, man assumes the position that he knows what is best, while God really does not know. Man, however, lacks the divine perspective.

The final rhetorical question here looks to the future: “For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?” Again, “no one” is the answer. Notice also again Solomon’s use of “under the sun” for that is his chosen perspective in this book. It probably is not that he does not know anything about the answer to the question. So his “observations” are not likely to be “final conclusions about life...perhaps they reveal something of his method and his concealed premise. He may be attempting to demonstrate man’s inability to find meaning to life unaided by divine revelation and interruption. This solo quest will always end in futility.”²⁵ Once again, therefore, Solomon is probably not saying that he himself had no idea of life after death, etc. Rather, he is dealing with the issue of what definite conclusions man can draw about life from his perspective from under the sun only, that is, apart from divine revelation.

22Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980. 205.

23Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980. 205.

24R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980). 767.

25Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980. 205.