

Good Work

Ecclesiastes 9:10-11:6

Solomon delivers pointed advice for working in this inscrutable world. Though life is *hevel*, out of our control, this does not mean that wisdom and hard work are pointless. Despite our inability to figure it all out or guarantee results, we are to work smart and hard. Plow, plant, and leave the increase to the Lord.

The Map

- I. 1:1-2:26 Satisfaction cannot be found in a vaporous world. Only God can give it.
- II. 3:1-5:20 God is sovereign over all despite grief and hardship.
- III. 6:1-8:15 Look beyond appearances in order to understand and live wisely.
- IV. 8:16-12:14 Last, Solomon addresses challenges and difficulties, and the need to seek wisdom and live joyfully despite them. This is the gift of God.
 - i. 8:16-9:9 Live joyfully despite your lack of control of events and brevity of life under the sun.
 - ii. 9:10-11:6 Work with all your might, trusting the Lord.

Work While You Can

You can't know all the business that is done under the sun (8:17), but you *can* find work to do and then do it with all your might. You are going to die, and because there is no device, knowledge, or wisdom in the grave where you are going, do it now (v. 10). Solomon isn't discounting or denying the afterlife, but emphasizing the urgency of taking the opportunity now. Just as he insists on joy in these days (9:9), so he calls for maximum effort while you can give it. You can't work your job, build your house, or take on any projects here when you are dead. As always, he commends this without guaranteeing success: the swift don't always win the race, the strong won't necessarily overcome in battle, the wise don't always prosper, clever men don't always get rich, and the talented don't always succeed. Time and chance (*pega*: occurrence) happen to them all (v. 11). Speed, strength, wisdom, understanding, and skill usually lead to success, but under the sun there is no guarantee. Still, he says, work like God wants you to. Sometimes disastrous circumstances come and prevent us, so we should while we can (v. 12). People who wait for the perfect opportunity, ideal conditions, all the perks, and the job that suits what they think are their gifts, should get to work on what is front of them now. Work the imperfect job on the way to something better.

Work Smart

Wealth, power, and greatness do not guarantee wisdom, and wisdom can overcome them. Solomon saw a situation where a poor wise man could have delivered a city. He either did and was forgotten, or he was simply ignored and the city fell (vv. 13-15). The unwise will say, "See, wisdom doesn't matter." Clearly, for that city it didn't, but don't be like that city because wisdom is better than strength (v. 16). Successful wise people are seldom very loud but you can ask them questions and learn rather giving ear to clamoring fools (v. 17). Your mother doesn't have the loudest voice but listen to her wisdom over your chatty friends. Wisdom excels weaponry, but one fool can wipe out a lot of good (v. 18).

Wisdom Excels

Solomon delivers a pile of proverbs in chapter 10 for the wise to embrace, understand, put to use, and enjoy. Why, if results aren't guaranteed? Because God is wise and therefore honoring and imitating Him is our highest good. Like a dead fly ("flies that bring death" likely through disease) that ruins healing

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ointment, so a little folly stands out in an otherwise wise man (10:1). Wisdom acts and accomplishes, and so the wise man's heart works in his right hand whereas the fool's is limp and ineffective in his left (v. 2). You can see a fool coming because he puts himself on display (v. 3). If a ruler comes against you, don't desert your assignment or lose your head (v. 4). When other people freak out, don't join them. Keep a level head and instead let them imitate you: "For conciliation pacifies great offense" (v. 4). Solomon saw egalitarianism issued from the top: foolishness promoted to the place of dignity while nobility is marginalized, servants riding on horses while princes escort them (vv. 5-7). All people bear the image of God equally and should stand equally before the law, which is why lady justice wears a blindfold. She doesn't care whether you are rich or poor, black or white, male or female. But this does not mean that all people have equal gifts, talents, abilities, intelligence and so on. The Supreme Court just ruled that colleges can't factor race into their admissions process, and this is controversial because much of our elite ruling class wants equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity. They want to decide what's fair based on their preferences, which Solomon calls evil (v. 5). There's always danger: if you dig, you might fall; snakes are hidden; valuable stones are heavy; working with wood could injure you (vv. 8-9). There are no perfect solutions, only tradeoffs. Working with a dull ax might be slightly safer, but it's a waste of time and energy (v. 10). Sharpen it and be smart; use wisdom to your advantage. Words are powerful and dangerous, and an untrained viper is as a verbose man (v. 11). A wise man's words grace him and others, but a fool's yammering devours him (v. 12). He won't stop and can't stop, talking about things he doesn't know and things to come that he can't know (vv. 13-14). When he finally gets around to doing something, he messes it up (v. 15). It's shame and trouble to a country when the king is immature, when princes feast in the morning and day-drink (v. 16). Conversely, a land is blessed when the king is a son of nobles, knowing the proper time to feast. This results in more strength rather drunken dissolution (v. 17). Buildings, houses, institutions, societies, churches, and families decay through idleness and laziness (v. 18). Feasting and wine are good for laughter and merrymaking, but money speaks to everything (v. 19). Hyperbole can be wise. Don't curse the king, even in your heart, or the rich in your bedroom because long before electronic recording devices the walls could talk (v. 20).

Work as Unto the Lord

God not only governs the inscrutable world, He rules over our little work, too. We walk and work by faith. If you cast your bread upon the waters, you have no guarantee it will come back, Life.Church's tithe-for-blessing guarantee notwithstanding (11:1). Casting bread likely refers to commerce, to trading or selling grain by ship. We know that he who gives to the poor lends to the Lord and He will repay (Prov. 19:17). You don't know what will happen tomorrow, so give to seven or eight (v. 2). Clouds rain, trees fall, and there it is (v. 3). Those looking for excuses not to work will find them, so don't and hit it hard (v. 4). We know so very little of small or great things whether the wind or the womb, but God does (v. 5). What we do know is that we should get to it in the morning and get it done in the evening (v. 6). We don't know how or when God will bless our efforts, so we leave the results to Him. We know where He has placed us, the goodness of work, and that godliness with contentment is great gain.