



# Ecclesiastes

*Does Life Have Meaning?*

## The Meaninglessness of Wealth

### **Ecclesiastes 6:1-9**

In chapter 6, Qoheleth speaks from personal observation of what he sees “under the sun.” What he observes is described as an “evil” that “lies heavy on mankind” and is common for those who live for self (under the sun). The wealthy self-absorbed man has many possessions and is respected by those around him, but he finds no lasting joy and contentment.



God is provider of the man’s wealth and possessions even if he does not recognise God’s providential care. Anything that anyone accomplishes is only possible because God created all, sustains all, and set in order the laws of nature. God does not give this man the power to enjoy his wealth; probably because the man does not acknowledge, love, and obey God.

There is great futility in living for self. This man’s wealth is eventually owned by another who may have gained it in business, war, or through some foolishness of the wealthy man.

Not only is wealth without God folly, but a long life with many children will also not satisfy the greed present in those who live “under the sun.” The man Solomon describes has even lost the ability to be buried in dignity. In times of war, bodies were left to be ravaged by animals and the elements. To die, discontented, and without proper burial was viewed as so terrible that to have been stillborn would have been better. The stillborn child did not suffer the meaningless of greed and will find immediate rest. It is better never to experience life in this world than to live with discontentment.

Both the wealthy man and the stillborn infant end in *Sheol* (6:6). *Sheol* is the Hebrew word meaning “unseen abode of the dead.” Solomon is not speaking of where one spends eternity, but rather that the future of all is to die and be buried.

- 1. For what ways is a stillborn child in a better situation than one who dies discontented?**

#### **Hedonistic Paradox**

In ethics there is a what is called “*hedonistic paradox*.” Hedonism is the desire to please self, but the paradox is that the more one tries to please self, the more discontented he becomes.

**2. What can we learn about children who have not yet been born (or who die stillborn) in 6:3-6?**

**3. What is the purpose of Solomon's use of hyperbole in 6:3-6?**

**4. What is the meaning of 6:7?**

Not only does the pursuit of wealth end in meaninglessness, but the same can be said for wisdom. The wise, the foolish, and the poor all end up in *Sheol*. One does not have to be wealthy by the world's standards to be discontented and to live life in the pursuit of more.

The truth of the matter is that a man does better when he enjoys what is directly before him in the present rather than constantly looking for something in the future.

### Truth

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this is also vanity and striving after the wind."

(Ecclesiastes 6:9 ESV)

**5. Why do people often fail to find enjoyment in the present while looking for happiness in some future event or attainment?**

## Introduction to Part 2

### ***Ecclesiastes 6:10-12***

Ecclesiastes 6:10 marks the beginning of the second half of the book. Here Solomon will look at two main subjects: 1) A desire to find out what is good and 2) an admission of ignorance and uncertainty about the future.

One of the primary questions man has is: "Who am I?" We know from Genesis 2:7 that God formed man from the dust of the earth. The created man is weak and powerless compared to his Creator. Man tries to argue with God, but this debate is futile because God (the one who is stronger than he) is in control and beyond the reach of man's criticisms. In fact according to 6:11, the more one hurls words at God the more vain they become.

**6. How and why does man sometimes attempt to rebel against God with words?**

**7. Why do more words bring more vanity when confronting God?**



**8. What does Ecc. 5:2 and 6:1 teach us about approaching God with words?**

**9. What is the relationship of the potter to the clay and how does this relate to what Solomon is writing in 6:10-12?**



Man cannot know his future on this earth, but God does. Man's life is described as a shadow in 6:12, not referring so much to the brevity of life as the transitory nature of life. A man is born, lives for a few years, and a short time later is forgotten. While living in this world a man does not know what will happen in the days, months, and years ahead and he is unaware of what will happen on earth after his passing.

**10. How should the view of man's frailty and uncertain future (in the present life) affect his relationship to the Creator?**

The unknowable future reinforces what Qoheleth has previously taught that a man should enjoy God's present blessings and not be concerned with looking for something better in the uncertain future.