

## The Biblical Man

### *Work and Wealth*

Ecclesiastes (Heb. *Qohelet*) means “The Preacher” or “The Teacher.” Most scholars believe it was written by Solomon in his old age, after he had fallen away from his faith, when both his recent turmoil and repentance (1 Kings 11) were still fresh in his mind. In it Solomon is repenting of his apostasy, and he teaches that everything in the flesh—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away (Ecc 1:16-17). Life in the world has, our work especially, significance only when man remembers his Creator (Ecc 12:1).

### ***Life as a Vapor***

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. There may be less agreement about the meaning and interpretation of Ecclesiastes than any other biblical book. Because it presents such a pessimistic outlook on life, and a mood of existential despair, many have viewed Ecclesiastes as running counter to the rest of Scripture. Solomon uses the word “meaningless” or “vanity” (Heb. *hebel*) to describe all work, labor or human endeavor. “Vapor” or “breath-like” best captures the meaning of *hebel*. Scripture echoes this idea in James 4:14 and Psalm 103:15–16. “You will exist forever. You and God are both in the universe to stay—either as friends on his terms, or enemies on yours. Which it will be is proven in this life. And all this life is a vapor. Two seconds, and we will be gone.” – John Piper. What emotions are stirred up in your heart and mind as you read this passage and consider your own life?

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### ***Life Under the Sun***

The theme of Ecclesiastes is housed in vv. 2 and 3. One of the keys to understanding Ecclesiastes is the phrase “under the sun.” It is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Old Testament. Solomon's viewpoint includes exclusively the world we can observe, his observation point is solely at ground level. When we understand that the setting for Solomon's argument is the realm of the natural world, fallen creation separated from God, a world not yet privy to the special revelation of God in Jesus Christ, does the Solomon's argument begin to make more sense? Was Solomon's big idea correct within his frame of reference?

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### ***Setting the Record Crooked***

So many of us are either workaholics who idolize prestige and wealth, or catatonic sluggards who feel helpless in a world of frustration, covetousness, and constant disappointment. Work was made as a good and necessary aspect of our existence. At the fall, the tether that held us and all of creation in relationship with God was broken. This complicated things. God cursed the ground and now everything under our dominion fights against us. You think you have all the dishes washed and from a bedroom or a bathroom there appears, as from a ghost, another dirty glass. And even when all the dishes are washed, it is only a few hours until they demand washing again. So much of our work is cyclical, and so much of it futile. Solomon's perspective was not as broad as those of us who benefit from New Testament revelation. Does this help you understand why it is so hard to labor? Do you view life as a rut, a continuous circle of routine? Does the despair of Solomon resonate a little too much with you? Are you constantly frustrated by the meaningless toil, repetition and labor of your life?

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### **Worldliness**

God himself is a worker, 6 days of creation, one to rest and enjoy the fruits of His labor. God created work as a good and natural thing for Adam and Eve prior to the fall. Solomon was looking "under the sun," but by God's grace we have the opportunity to look "over the sun" throughout the rest of Scripture. We have the glorious hope of being in the presence of God himself through Jesus Christ. Should that truth not convict us of having a worldly view of life and work? Do you view work as a privilege or a burden? A blessing or a curse? Are you guilty of a self-centered worldview rather than a God-centered one?

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### ***A Striving After the Wind***

Read Ecc 1:12-2:17 and Ecc 3:22. Instead of withdrawing as far as possible from the world in order to promote holiness, Ecclesiastes teaches us that the way to holiness to use and transform the world in ways that glorify God and give honor to his name. This book helps the reader develop a God-centered worldview and recognize the dangers of a self-centered worldview. It does not describe the life of faith or teach what the responsibilities of faith in God are. Solomon is not preaching the Gospel in this book. This is a sorrowful and sobering look at a man who is repenting of sin and folly. Solomon had reached the end of his life and is teaching on the transitory and futile

nature of so much of human endeavor, that it is impossible for any human endeavor “under the sun” to have permanent value.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58. Of course, looked at only “under the sun,” a person's daily work might seem to be futile and burdensome, but the in Christ, the believer can always labor gladly in the will of god, knowing his labor is “not in vain in the Lord.” Solomon had been living through all these experiences under the sun, concerned with nothing above the sun, on the modern level of experience in the realm of the material, until there came a moment in which he had seen the whole of life. And there was something over the sun. It is only as a man takes account of that which is over the sun as well as that which is under the sun that things under the sun are seen in their true light. How does knowing that your work—whether it’s scrubbing toilets or crunching numbers—is pleasing to God transform your view of the daily grind?

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### **Special Revelation**

“Jesus Christ came into this world—this fleeting, fallen, fickle world—and did the greatest thing that will ever be done. As the perfect Son of God, He died in our place, absorbed the wrath of God, paid the penalty for sin, provided the righteousness of the law, and rose invincible from the dead—all in a vapor’s life of thirty-three years. Because of that, we have something firm to grasp. ‘Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever’ (Isaiah 40:7–8). The gospel is firm and lasts forever. My prayer is that ... the Word of God will link you with eternal joy, and make the vapor of your life an everlasting aroma of praise to the glory of Christ.” – John Piper. As we have studied, every aspect of life is an opportunity to glorify God and find our ultimate pleasure fulfilled in relationship with Him. Are you glorifying God with your work? How are you falling short (Rom 3:23)?

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### **The “Varsity” Squad**

Read Ecc 9:10, 1 Cor 10:31, and Col 3:16-24. One of the biggest myths about work is that there are “Christian jobs” and Non-Christians jobs.” It’s not about the job, it’s about how you work it. You can be a pastor to the glory of God, and you can be a plumber to the glory of God. A biblical worldview makes no distinctions between sacred occupations and secular occupations. That is what American evangelicalism and youth groups tell you, that anyone who is not in full-time ministry or foreign missions is not a

real Godly man, he's on the "JV" squad. False. All of life is work. Are you guilty of this perception of work? Have you been told this before?

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### ***God's Resources***

A factor that makes our work of lasting value is God's enablement with His grace by His Spirit. Reference to either of these supernatural resources is totally absent in Ecclesiastes. This omission further highlights the fact that Solomon's viewpoint was that of earthly life without supernatural intervention. Without the God's enabling grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, hard work and discipline becomes an idol, the result of your own goodness. How are you seeking to fill your work life with an imprint of the Spirit and seek His guidance in all things? Are you working out of your position in Christ, rather than a sense of duty? What are some of your work-related idols/sins?

Envy of others (Ecc 4:4-6)

Greed for self (Ecc 4:7-12)

Position and prestige (Ecc 4:13-16)

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### ***Prosperity or Poverty? It's all about righteousness.***

In his most well known sermon on money titled "The Use of Money" John Wesley (one of the founders of the Methodist movement) is quoted as saying "Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can." It was an argument for industriousness, hard work, and cleverness; saving, investing and living in simplicity; giving tithes and offerings, supporting God's work, and living out of radical generosity. Mark Driscoll has some great insights on the issue of wealth in [this article from the Seattle Times](#). Which category do you fall into?

Unrighteous Poor (e.g. Sluggard): Read Proverbs 10:4, 19:15, 13:4, 13:25, 14:20, 28:19-22

Righteous Poor (e.g. Job, Paul, Jesus): Read Proverbs 15:16, 16:8, 28:6

Unrighteous Rich (e.g. Pharaoh): Read Proverbs 10:22, 11:16, 28:25, 23:4, 28:8

Righteous Rich (e.g. Job, Abraham, Boaz) Read Proverbs 15:6, 10:22, 11:24-25, 3:9-10.

### ***The Lord's Provision***

Read Proverbs 16:26, 1 Thess 4:11-12, and 2 Thess 3:6-13. One of the greatest myths on wealth is that God provides everything, so we just need to pray for provision.

