

God Enables and Determines

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Ecclesiastes 6:1-9 – *“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: ² A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction. ³ If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he— ⁴ for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. ⁵ Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man, ⁶ even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place? ⁷ All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied. ⁸ For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, who knows how to walk before the living? ⁹ Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*

Background Notes

A sizeable portion of Ecclesiastes 5 dealt with the topic of money and riches. Verses 10-17 contained a number of negatives about the pursuit of money and riches, and we listed six negatives:

1. Riches cannot satisfy. *“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity” (v10).*
2. Riches result in “parasites” - and more stuff to manage. *“When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?” (v11).*
3. Riches cause insomnia. *“The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (v12).*
4. Riches lead to hoarding. *“There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt” (v13).*
5. Riches can disappear. *“But those riches perish through misfortune; when he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand” (v14).*

6. Riches must be left behind. *“As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ And this also is a severe evil— just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind? ¹⁷ All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.” (v15-17).*

If the Lord chooses to give us riches and wealth, the right view and our proper response is given at the end of chapter 5. Wealth is something that God (in His wisdom) has **not** chosen for most of us! The Lord knows that most of us can’t handle lots of money properly – but don’t you wish that He would at least give us a trial run? [laughter]

So what *is* the right view, and the right attitude, and our right response, if the Lord chooses to make us wealthy? The answer is: *“As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God” (5:19).* If the Lord chooses to bless us with money without our striving for it, then we should accept it from Him as a gift. Then we should look to the Lord for the ability to use the money properly, for the Lord’s glory. Only then can we truly enjoy riches and wealth.

What about the person to whom God gives riches and wealth, but not the ability to enjoy them? What if God allows someone else who is not even an heir to get the inheritance? That’s the question Solomon asked in chapter 6, verse 2, *“A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it.”*

What about a man who has many descendants and lives a long life, but isn’t able to enjoy what he’s been given, and is not even given a proper burial? That was Solomon’s question in verse 3: *“If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial.”* The answer to these questions is our first doctrinal point.

Doctrinal Points

1. You cannot enjoy wealth unless God enables you.

If you don’t have the Lord in your life, and you don’t have the power from Him to handle wealth properly, then you will not only fail to enjoy your wealth, but (humanly speaking) it would be better to be stillborn: *“I say that a stillborn child is better than he” (v3)* – that is, better than the man who lives and has wealth, but is not enabled by God to properly use it. An infant who is “miscarried” or stillborn would never have to face the frustrations and sorrows of life. *“For it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man” (v4-5).* Even if a wealthy person were to live two thousand years, in the end he goes to the

grave, as does the stillborn, verse 6, *“Even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?”* (v6).

If you don't have the Lord, and you don't have the God-given ability to live life properly, money and wealth will not satisfy you - because natural desire is never satisfied: *“All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied”* (v7).

Without the Lord, ultimately the wise and wealthy person has no advantage over the fool, and no advantage for the poor man, though the poor man knows the ways of life better than others. *“For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, who knows how to walk before the living?”* (v8).

Verse 9 concludes this section about money and riches and wealth: *“Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.”*

Don't constantly strive to fulfill your fleshly, selfish desires – that is futile. Be content with what you have! Then by looking to the Lord, and with His enabling, you will be able to enjoy life - and you'll be able to handle life properly at all levels of prosperity. But remember, you cannot enjoy wealth without being enabled by God.

2. You cannot change whatever God has already determined.

Verses 10-12: *“Whatever one is, he has been named already, and he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he. Since there are many things that increase vanity, how is man the better? For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?”*

The Bible teaches that God is omniscient: He knows everything – past, present, and future. Therefore, everything has been predetermined by God. That's exactly what the Bible teaches. Ephesians 1:11 says that *“God works all things after the counsel of His will.”* As we've said so often, *“There are no ‘maverick molecules’ in the universe!”* - because everything is completely under God's control.

This is exactly what verse 10 teaches, in the context of our destiny: *“Whatever one is, he has been named already, for it is known that he is man; and he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.”* You can argue with God all you want, with many words, but you cannot change whatever God has already determined. Man does not control his destiny. God controls the destiny of every person. This is not fatalism, because fatalism does not acknowledge God. This is God's total sovereignty over everything.

But what about the free will of mankind, what about answers to prayer, etc.? All of that is taken into account under God's sovereignty. God knows the end from the beginning, and therefore whatever God has already determined cannot be changed. "Under the sun," we cannot know how decisions and events will work out, or what's best for us, because we don't know the future.

Verse 12: *"For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?"* Notice - it is "under the sun." Under the sun, we don't know the future - but we know the One who is "above the sun"- and He holds our future!

So we live our lives in light of divine revelation that comes from "above the sun." In the words of Proverbs 3:5-6, we trust the Lord with all our hearts, and we don't depend on our own understanding. If we acknowledge Him in all our ways, we can trust Him to direct our paths. Remember, you cannot change what God has already determined.

Practical Application

Are you willing to "pray money away"?

In chapters 5-6 we saw that God chooses to give riches and wealth to some people - and until it happens, we don't know whether He'll choose to give riches to us or not. We also saw that some people can use money properly - and some people can't handle it well at all.

Here's the question: Are you willing to pray the following prayer? "Lord, if I can't handle the money properly, may it please be your will that I remain poor."

A man who was in my Bible study once told me that he was going to inherit a large sum of money in the near future. He asked for my counsel on how to properly use this money, as a Christian. (I was tempted to say that I knew of a particular ministry that could use the money wisely - but I restrained myself! [laughter])

In answer to his question, I suggested that he should pray this prayer: "Lord, if I can't handle this inheritance properly and wouldn't use it for the glory of God, then please Lord, don't send this money my way!" Sadly, he was unwilling to pray that prayer.

Would *you* have been willing to pray that prayer?

Are you willing to "pray money away"?