

ECCLESIASTES;

OR, The Preacher

THREE things in general are to be noted concerning this book:

1. The author of it, who was Solomon, as is manifest both from the common consent of Jewish and Christian writers, and from the express words of the first verse. Nor can any thing be opposed to it but bold and groundless conjectures. That he wrote it in his old age is more than probable from divers passages in it, as, that he did it after his buildings, **#Ec 2:4**, which yet took up twenty years of his life, **#1Ki 9:10**, and after some considerable enjoyment of them, and planting of gardens and orchards, and reaping the fruit of them, **#Ec 2:5,6**, and after long and much consideration and experience of all those methods in which men expected to find happiness, and after he had been deeply plunged in impure and inordinate loves, **#Ec 7:27**, &c., and from many other places, which may be observed by any diligent reader. And so this book was written by him as a public testimony of his repentance and detestation of all those vain and wicked courses to which he had addicted himself; wherein he followed the example of his father David, who after his sad fall penned the 51st Psalm. And the truth of this opinion may be confirmed by that expression, **#2Ch 11:17**, they walked in the way of David and Solomon, i.e. wherein they walked both before their falls, and after their repentance.

2. The form or method of it. For whereas there are some passages in it which may seem offensive and impious, for which some few persons have suspected its authority, it must be considered that it is in part dramatical, as was said before of the Book of Proverbs, and that Solomon speaks some and most things in his own name, but some other things in the names and according to the opinions of those worldly and ungodly men, as is undeniably manifest, both from the scope and design of the book, as it is expressed both in the beginning and in the conclusion of it, and from his serious and large disputation against those wicked principles and courses. And this way of writing is not unusual amongst both sacred and profane writers.

3. The design and business of it, which is to describe man's true happiness, and the way leading to it; which he doth both negatively, asserting and proving that it is not to be found either in secular wisdom,

or in sensual pleasures, or in worldly greatness and glory, or in abundance of riches, or in a vain profession of religion; and positively, showing that it is to be had only by the fear of God, and obedience to his laws, which alone can give a man a contented and cheerful enjoyment of his present comforts, and assurance of his future and everlasting happiness.

Ecclesiastes 1:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 1

All is vanity; our labour great and unprofitable, Ecc_1:1-3. The whole course of things is always going and returning, Ecc_1:4-7. Nothing in nature is satisfied, Ecc_1:8. Nothing new; old things are forgot, Ecc_1:9-11. The search after wisdom is itself a vain labour; cannot supply our natural wants, nor satisfy our desires; but increaseth sorrow: all this the Preacher found out by experience, Ecc_1:12-18.

The Preacher; who was not only a king, but also a teacher of God's people, which he did both by words, upon some solemn occasions, and by writings; who having sinned grievously and scandalously in the eyes of all the world, justly thought himself obliged to preach or publish his true repentance for all his folly and wickedness, and to give public warning and wholesome counsels to all persons to avoid those rocks upon which he had split. The Hebrew properly signifies either *gathering* or *gathered* ; and so it signifies either,

1. A preacher, as it is commonly rendered, whose office it is to gather in souls unto God or his church. Or,

2. A penitent or convert, or one gathered or brought back by true repentance to God, and to his church, from which he had so wickedly revolted. *King of Jerusalem* : this is added partly as a description of the person or author of this book, Solomon, who was the only man that was both

son of David, properly so called, *and king of Jerusalem* ; and partly as an aggravation of his sin, because he was *the son of David* , a wise and godly father, who had given him both excellent counsel, and, for his general course, a good example: and for the evil example which he gave him in the matter of Uriah, that also, considered with his hearty and effectual repentance for it, and the dreadful punishments of it upon his person and family, was a fair warning and most powerful instruction to him to learn by his father's example, and because he was

a king, not by birth, for he was not David's eldest son, but by the special favour and designation of that God whom he had now so ill requited, and that in Jerusalem, a holy city, the place of God's special presence, and of his worship, where he had daily opportunities to know and obligations to practise better things, which place he had defiled by his horrid sins, and thereby made it, and all God's people, and the true religion, and the name of the blessed God, odious and contemptible amongst all the nations round about him.

Ecclesiastes 1:2

Vanity of vanities; not only vain, but vanity in the abstract, which notes extreme vanity, especially where the word is thus doubled; as *a king of kings* is the chief of kings, and a servant of servants is the vilest of servants, and a song of songs is a most excellent song.

Saith the Preacher, upon deep consideration and long experience, and by Divine inspiration. This verse contains the general proposition, which he intends particularly to demonstrate in the whole following book.

All, all worldly things, and all men's designs, and studies, and works about them, *is vanity* ; not in themselves, for so they are God's creatures, and therefore good and really useful in their kinds; but in reference to men, and to that happiness which men seek and confidently expect to find in them. So they are unquestionably *vain* , because they are not what they seem to be, and perform not what they promise, content and satisfaction, but instead of that are commonly the causes or occasions of innumerable cares, and fears, and sorrows, and mischiefs; and because they are altogether unsuitable to the noble mind or soul of man, both in nature or quality, and in duration, as being unstable and perishing things. And this vanity of them is here repeated again and again; partly, because it was most deeply fixed and perpetually present in Solomon's thoughts; partly, to show the unquestionable certainty and vast importance of this truth; and partly, that he might more thoroughly awaken the dull and stupid minds of men to the consideration of it, and might wean men's hearts from those things upon which he knew they excessively doted.

Ecclesiastes 1:3

What profit? or, as others render it, *What remainder* ? What real and abiding benefit hath a man by it? None at all. All is unprofitable, as to

the attainment of that happiness which Solomon here is, and all men in the world are, inquiring after.

His labour, Heb.

his toilsome labour, both of body and mind, in the pursuit of riches, or pleasures, or other earthly things.

Which he taketh under the sun; in all sublunary or worldly matters, which are usually transacted in the day time, or by the light of the sun. By this restriction he implies that that profit and happiness which in vain is sought for in this lower world, is really and only to be found in heavenly places and things.

Ecclesiastes 1:4

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: men continue but for one, and that a short age, and then they leave all their possessions to the succeeding age; and therefore they cannot be happy here, because happiness must needs be unchangeable and eternal; or else the perpetual fear and certain knowledge of the approaching loss of all these things will rob a man of all solid contentment in them.

The earth abideth for ever, i.e. through all successive generations of men; and therefore man in this respect is more mutable and miserable than the very earth upon which he stands; and which, together with all the glories and comforts which he enjoyed in it, he leaveth behind him to be possessed by others.

Ecclesiastes 1:5

The sun is in perpetual motion, sometimes arising, and sometimes setting, and then arising again, and so constantly repeating its courses in all succeeding days, and years, and ages; and the like he observes concerning the winds and rivers, Ecc_1:6,7. And the design of these similitudes seems to be, either,

1. That by representing the constant changes and restless motions of these particular things he might intimate that it is so with all other earthly things; and therefore no man can expect satisfaction from them.
Or,

2. That by comparing the sun, and wind, and rivers, as, Ecc_1:4, he compared the earth with man, he might show that man, considered as mortal, is in a more unhappy condition than these things, because when the earth abides, man goes; and when the sun sets, he riseth again; and

so the wind and rivers return to their former place and state, but man, when once he dies, he never returns again to this life; of which comparison see Job_14:7,12. Or,

3. To show the vanity of all worldly things, and that man's mind can never be satisfied with them, because there is nothing in the world but a constant repetition of the same things, which is so irksome a thing, that the consideration thereof hath made some persons weary of their lives; and there is no new thing under the sun, as is added in the foot of the account, Ecc_1:9, which seems to me to be given as a key to understand the meaning of the foregoing passages. And this is manifest and certain from experience, that the things of this world are so narrow, and the mind of man so vast, that there must be something new to satisfy the mind; and even delightful things, by too frequent repetition or long continuance, are so far from yielding satisfaction, that they grow tedious and troublesome.

Ecclesiastes 1:6

The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; the wind also sometimes blows from one quarter of the world, and sometimes from another; all of them being synecdochically comprehended under these two eminent quarters. But because this word, the *wind*, is not expressed in the Hebrew, but is only borrowed or understood from the latter clause of the verse, this first clause is by other judicious interpreters understood of the sun, of whom he last spake; the words being thus rendered according to the Hebrew, *He* (the sun) *goeth towards the south*, (which he doth one half of the year,) and turneth about unto the north, which he doth the other half. And so here is the whole motion of the sun towards the four quarters of the world particularly described; his daily motion from east to, west, and back again, Ecc_1:5; and his yearly motion from north to south, between the signs of Cancer and Capricorn.

The wind returneth again according to his circuits: this clause is by all understood of the wind, which is fitly mentioned immediately after the sun, because it hath its rise from the sun, who is therefore called *the father of winds*, and the winds do usually rise with the sun, and are laid when he sets. But then it is rendered thus, and that very agreeably to the Hebrew, *the wind goeth continually whirling or compassing about, and he returneth again to his circuits*, being sometimes in one, and

sometimes in another quarter, and successively returning to the same quarters in which he had formerly been.

Ecclesiastes 1:7

Is not full, to wit, to the brink, or so as to overflow the earth, which might be expected from such vast accessions to it; whereby also he intimates the emptiness and dissatisfaction of men's minds, not withstanding all the abundance of creature-comforts.

Unto the place from whence the rivers come; either,

1. Unto the sea, from whence they are supposed to return into their proper channels, and then, as it is expressed, thither (i.e. into the sea) they return again. Or,

2. Unto their springs or fountains, to which the waters return by secret passages of the earth, as is manifest from the Caspian Sea, and reasonably supposed in other places. Or rather,

3. Unto the earth in general, from whence they come or How into the sea, and to which they return again by the reflux of the sea. For he seems to speak of the visible and constant motion of the waters, both to the sea and from it, and then to it again in a perpetual reciprocation; which agrees best with the former similitudes, Ecc_1:5,6.

Ecclesiastes 1:8

All things, not only the sun, and winds, and rivers, which I have mentioned, but all other creatures, *are full of labour* ; both subjectively, as they are in continual restlessness and change, never abiding in the same state or place; and efficiently, as they cause great and sore labour to men, in getting, and keeping, and enjoying of them, yea, even in the study of them, as is noted hereafter.

Man cannot utter it; the labour is inexpressibly and unconceivably great.

The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing; as there are many things in the world troublesome and vexatious to men's senses and minds, so even those things which are comfortable and acceptable to them are not satisfactory, but men are constantly desiring some longer continuance or fuller enjoyment of them, or variety in them, and they never say, It is enough, I desire no more. *The eye* and *ear* are here synecdochically put for all the senses, because these are most spiritual and refined, most curious and inquisitive, most

capable of receiving satisfaction, because they are exercised with more ease and pleasure than the other senses, whose satisfactions are oft attended with greater weariness and manifold dangers and inconveniences.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

There is nothing in the world but a continued and tiresome repetition of the same things. The nature and course of the beings and affairs of the world, and the tempers of men's minds, are generally the same that they ever were and shall ever be; and therefore because no man ever yet received satisfaction from any worldly things, it is a vain and foolish thing for any person hereafter to expect it.

No new thing, to wit, in the nature of things, which might give us hopes of attaining that satisfaction which things have not hitherto afforded. For otherwise this doth not restrain the God of nature, who hath frequently done, and still can do, new and miraculous works, and who can and doth discover to particular persons new inventions, when it pleaseth him.

Ecclesiastes 1:10

For the proof hereof I appeal to the consciences and experiences of all men. It hath been already of old thee; the same things have been said and done before, though possibly we did not know it.

Ecclesiastes 1:11

There is no remembrance of former things: this seems to be added to prevent this objection, There are many new inventions and enjoyments unknown to former ages. To this he answers, This objection is grounded only upon our ignorance of ancient times and things, which is very great, and which if we did exactly know or remember, we should easily find parallels to all present occurrences in former ages. The latter clause tends both to illustrate and confirm the former. The sense is, There are many thousands of remarkable speeches and actions done in this and the following ages, which neither are, nor ever will be, put into the public records or histories, and consequently they must unavoidably be forgotten and lost unto succeeding ages; and therefore it is just and reasonable to believe the same concerning former ages, seeing the same causes are most likely to produce the same effects.

Ecclesiastes 1:12

This verse is a preface to the following discourse, that by the consideration of the quality of the speaker they might be induced to give more attention and respect to his words. Having asserted the vanity of all things in the general, he now comes to prove his assertion in all those particulars wherein men commonly seek, and with greatest probability expect to find true happiness. He begins with secular wisdom. And to show how competent a judge he was of this matter, he lays down his character, that he was the

Preacher, which implies eminent knowledge and ability to teach others; or, *the convert*, who had learned by dear-bought experience what he now taught them; and a king, who therefore had all imaginable opportunities and advantages for the attainment of happiness, and particularly for the getting of wisdom, by consulting all sorts of books and men, by trying all manner of experiments, and many other ways; and no ordinary king, but

king over Israel, God's own and only beloved people, a wise and a happy people, Deu_4:6,7 33:29, whose king he was by God's special and gracious appointment, and furnished by God with singular wisdom for the discharge of that great trust; and whose royal palace and abode was in Jerusalem, where were the house of God, and the most wise and learned of the priests attending upon it, and the seats of justice, and colleges or assemblies of the wisest men of their nation; of which see 2Ki_22:14 1Ch_25:8, &c.; Psa_122:5: all which helps concurring together in him, which very rarely do in any other men, makes the argument drawn from his experience more convincing and undeniable.

Ecclesiastes 1:13

I gave my heart, which phrase notes his serious and fixed purpose, his great industry and alacrity in it,

to seek and search out, to seek diligently and accurately, by wisdom, wisely, or by the help of that wisdom wherewith God had endowed me, concerning all things that are done under heaven; *concerning all the works of God and men in this lower world*; the works of nature, and their causes, effects, properties, and operations; the works of Divine providence, and God's counsels and ends in them; the work and depths of human policy in the conduct of personal, and domestical, and public affairs.

This sore travail, this difficult and toilsome work of searching out these things,

hath God given to the sons of man; God hath inflicted this as a just punishment upon man for his eating of the tree of knowledge, that instead of that sweet and perfect knowledge which God had freely infused into man at his first creation, he should now grope after some small parcels or fragments of it, and those too not to be gotten without the sweat of his brows and brains.

To be exercised therewith; to employ themselves in the painful study of these things, which now is both their duty and their punishment. Or, as it is rendered in the margin, and by many others, *to afflict them in or by it*, to chastise their former curiosity, and to give them matter of continual humiliation and vexation. And therefore knowledge is so far from making men happy, that it exposeth them to trouble and infelicity.

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I have seen, i.e. diligently observed, and in great measure understood.

Behold; for it was a great surprise to me, and therefore may seem strange to you.

All is vanity and vexation of spirit; and not only unsatisfying, but also troublesome, and an affliction or breaking to a man's spirit or mind. Or, as others, both ancient and modern translators, render it, *a feeding upon wind*, as these very words, save only that there is the verb from which this noun seems most probably deduced, are rendered, Hos_12:1, where also it signifies a fruitless or lost labour, and a disappointment of their hopes and desires of satisfaction. And so this is a repetition of the same thing in other words, according to the manner of these books.

Ecclesiastes 1:15

That which is crooked cannot be made straight; all our knowledge serves only to discover our diseases and miseries, but is oft itself utterly insufficient to heal or remove them; it cannot rectify those confusions and disorders which are either in our own hearts and lives, or in the men and things of the world.

That which is wanting, to wit, in our knowledge, and in order to man's complete satisfaction and felicity, cannot be numbered; we know

little of what we should or might know, or did know in the state of innocency, or shall know in the future life.

Ecclesiastes 1:16

I communed with mine own heart; I considered within myself in what condition I was, and what degrees of knowledge I had gained, and whether it was not my ignorance that made me unable to rectify those errors, and supply those wants, and wiser men could do it, though I could not.

I am come to great estate, Heb. *I am grown great* , to wit, in wisdom; or, *I have magnified* , or *greatly enlarged* . *Have gotten* , Heb. *have added* . As I had a large stock of wisdom infused into me by God, 1Ki_3:12 4:29, so I have greatly improved it by conversation, and study, and experience.

More wisdom than all they that have been before me, whether governors, or priests, or private persons; which was no vain boast, but a known and confessed truth, and profession hereof was necessary to demonstrate his assertion.

In Jerusalem; which was then the most eminent place in the world for wisdom and knowledge.

Had great experience, Heb. *had seen much* ; which intimates that his knowledge was clear, and certain, and experimental, as that is which we have from our own eyesight.

Wisdom and knowledge; two words signifying the same thing, as may be gathered from Ecc_1:18, and from the promiscuous use of them in this book, and in the Proverbs, and elsewhere, and implying all manner of knowledge, Divine or human, speculative or practical, political or philosophical.

Ecclesiastes 1:17

I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly, that I might thoroughly understand the nature and difference of truth and error, of virtue and vice, all things being best understood by contraries, and might discern if there were any opinion or practice amongst men which would give him full satisfaction.

Vexation of spirit; or, *feeding upon wind* , as Ecc_1:14.

Ecclesiastes 1:18

Grief, or *indignation* , or displeasure within himself, and against his present condition.

Increaseth sorrow; which he doth many ways, partly, because he gets his knowledge with hard and wearisome labour, both of mind and body, with the consumption of his spirits, and shortening and embitterment of his life; partly, because he is oft deceived with knowledge falsely so called, and oft mistakes errors for truths, and is perplexed with manifold doubts, from which ignorant men are wholly free; partly, because he foresees, and consequently feels, the terror of many miseries which are or are likely to come to pass, which are unobserved by less knowing persons, and which possibly never happen; partly, because he hath the clearer prospect into, and quicker sense of, his own ignorance, and infirmities, and disorders, and withal how vain and ineffectual all his knowledge is for the prevention or removal of them; and partly, because his knowledge is very imperfect and unsatisfying, yet increasing his thirst after more knowledge, and consequently after more dissatisfaction, because instead of that just honour, and delight, and advantage which he expects from it, he meets with nothing but envy, and opposition, and contempt, because his knowledge quickly fades and dies with him, and then leaves him in no better, and possibly in a much worse, condition than the meanest and most unlearned man in the world.

Ecclesiastes 2:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 2

Pleasure and mirth also vanity, Ecc_2:1,**2**; whether in wine, or buildings and gardens, or servants, or cattle, or silver and gold, or music, Ecc_2:3-8. This the Preacher searched out and found, and none need try after him, Ecc_2:9-12. Wisdom excelleth folly, Ecc_2:13,**14**; but the like event is to both, and both are forgotten; therefore is wisdom also vanity, and life hateful, Ecc_2:15-17. Not labour they know not for whom, but the fool enjoyeth the wise man's pains: this rendered his toil irksome, that he reaped no fruit, and yet his days were travail and grief, Ecc_2:18-23. There is nothing better than to enjoy contentedly what God giveth us; and this also is of God, who giveth travail to the sinner, Ecc_2:24-26.

I said in mine heart; being disappointed of my hopes from knowledge, I resolved in my own mind to try another course.

I will prove thee, O my soul, I will try whether I cannot make thee happy, with mirth; by allowing to myself the free enjoyment of the present and sensible delights of human life.

Enjoy pleasure; take thy fill of pleasure, and expect satisfaction thence.

Is vanity; is vain, and unable to make men happy, because sensible pleasures are mean and unsuitable to the noble and heaven-born soul of man, and if excessively used, apter to cloy and glut men than to satisfy them, and are frequently mixed with, and most commonly end in, bitterness, as being the great instruments and occasions of sin, and of all its fatal consequences.

Ecclesiastes 2:2

I said of laughter; of excessive mirth, which discovers itself by immoderate laughter, and other outward gestures.

It is mad; this is an act and sign of madness, more fit for fools, who know nothing, than for wise men, at least in this sin fill, and dangerous, and deplorable state of mankind, which calls for seriousness and sorrow from all considerate persons, in which case it is like the laughter of one in a frenzy; and none but a fool or madman can take satisfaction in such light and frothy pleasures, or expect happiness from them.

What doeth it? What good doeth it? or how can it make men happy? I challenge all the epicures in the world to give me a solid and satisfactory answer.

Ecclesiastes 2:3

To give myself unto wine; to relax and gratify my flesh with delicious meats and drinks, synecdochically expressed by *wine* here, as also Pro_9:2 Son_2:4, &c., as necessary food is by bread, Amo_7:12, compared with Amo_8:2.

Yet acquainting my heart with wisdom; yet resolving to use my wisdom; either,

1. To set bounds to my pleasures. Or rather,
2. That I might try whether I could not arrive at satisfaction, by mixing wine and wisdom together, by using wine to sweeten and allay the toils of wisdom, and wisdom to prevent that destruction which many bring upon themselves by intemperate pleasures whilst they seek for

satisfaction, that so I might have the comfort without the danger and mischief of pleasures.

To lay hold on folly; to pursue and addict myself to carnal pleasures, which was my folly.

Till I might see, & c.; till by trying several methods I might find out the true way to contentment and satisfaction, during this mortal life.

Ecclesiastes 2:4

I made me great works; magnificent works for my honour and delight.

I built me houses; of which see 1Ki_7:1, &c.; 1Ki_9:15, &c. I planted me vineyards: see Son_8:11.

Ecclesiastes 2:5

I made me gardens, Heb. *paradises* , or gardens of pleasure.

I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits, mixing pleasure and profit together.

Ecclesiastes 2:6

I made me pools of water, because the rain there fell but seldom.

The wood that bringeth forth trees; the nurseries of young trees newly planted in the orchards, which for the multitude of them were like a wood or forest.

Ecclesiastes 2:7

Born in my house, of my bond-servants, which therefore were a part of my possessions: see 1Ki_10:8 Ezr_2:55.

Ecclesiastes 2:8

The peculiar treasure of kings; either,

1. Vast riches, answerable to the state of a king. Or,

2. The greatest jewels and rarities of other kings, which they gave to me either as a tribute, or by way of present; of which see 1Ki_4:21 **9:11 10:2,10.**

Of the provinces; which were imposed upon or presented by all the provinces of my dominions.

Women singers; whose voices were more sweet than the men's.

And the delights of the sons of men; either,

1. All other delightful things. Or,
2. That in which men generally delight, to wit, musical instruments, as it follows.

Ecclesiastes 2:9

I was great, in riches, and power, and glory.

Also my wisdom remained with me; as yet I was not wholly besotted and seduced from God by these things, as I was afterwards; I still had the use of my reason, whereby I was capable of searching after and finding satisfaction, if it was to be had in those things.

Ecclesiastes 2:10

Whatsoever mine eyes desired; whatsoever was grateful to my senses, or my heart desired. He ascribes desire to the eyes, because the sight of the eyes is the usual and powerful incentive of desires; of which see Jos_7:21 Job_31:1 Mat_5:28.

I kept not from them; I denied myself nothing, at least of lawful delights, but went to the very utmost bounds of them; which was the occasion of his falling afterward into sinful pleasures. I withheld not my heart from any joy; as my heart was vehemently set upon pleasure, so I did not resist or curb it therein, but made all possible provisions to gratify it.

My heart rejoiced in all my labour; I had the comfort of all my labours, and was not hindered from the free and full enjoyment of them by sickness or war, or any other calamities occurrent.

This was my portion of all my labour; this present and temporary enjoyment of them was all the benefit which I could expect or receive from all my labours, so that I made the best of them. I had a heart to use them, which many men through covetousness have not; and I tasted the sweetness of them, which many others cannot do; and therefore if any man could arrive at happiness by this means, I had done it.

Ecclesiastes 2:11

I made a serious review of my former works and labours, and considered whether I had obtained that satisfaction in them which I designed and expected;

and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit; I found myself suddenly disappointed and wholly dissatisfied in this course.

There was no profit; the pleasure was past and gone, and I was never the better for it, but as empty as before, and had nothing left but sorrowful reflections upon it.

Ecclesiastes 2:12

I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly; of which see Ecc_1:7. Being frustrated of my hopes in pleasure, I returned to a second and more serious consideration of my first choice, to see whether there was not more satisfaction to be gotten from wisdom, than what I discovered at my first view.

What can the man do, to find out the truth in this matter, to discover the utmost satisfaction which was possibly to be found in pleasures? So this is added as a reason why he gave over the thoughts of pleasures, and directed them to another object, and why he so confidently asserted their vanity from his own particular experience, because he had made the best of them, and it was a vain thing for any private man to expect that from them which could not be found by a king, and such a king, who had so much wisdom to invent, and such vast riches to pursue and enjoy, all imaginary delights, and who had made it his design and business to search this to the bottom. That cometh after the

king; that succeeds me in this inquiry. That which hath been already done; as by others in former times, so especially by myself. They can make no new discoveries as to this point.

Ecclesiastes 2:13

Then I saw; or, *yet I saw* ; for this is added to prevent an Objection or mistake.

Wisdom excelleth folly; although wisdom is not sufficient to make men truly and perfectly happy, yet it is of a far greater use and excellency than vain pleasures, or any other follies.

As far as light excelleth darkness, i.e. vastly and unspeakably. Light is very pleasant and comfortable, and withal of great necessity and singular use to discover the differences of persons and things, to prevent mistakes and dangers, and to direct all a man's paths in the right way; whereas darkness is in itself doleful, and leads men into innumerable confusions, and errors, and miseries.

Ecclesiastes 2:14

Are in his head; in their proper place, and therefore they can see, which they could not do if they were out of his head. He hath the use of his eyes and reason, and sees his way, and orders all his affairs with discretion, and foresees, and so avoids, many dangers and mischiefs. Walketh in darkness; manageth his affairs ignorantly, rashly, and foolishly, whereby he showeth that his eyes are not in his head, but in his heels, or, as it is expressed, Pro_17:24, *in the ends of the earth* . And ; or, *yet* ; notwithstanding this excellency of wisdom above folly for our conduct in the matters of this life, yet at last they both come to one end.

One event happeneth to them all; both are subject to the same calamities, and to death itself, which utterly takes away all difference between them.

Ecclesiastes 2:15

Why was I then more wise? what benefit have I by my wisdom? or, to what purpose did I desire and take so much pains for wisdom?

Ecclesiastes 2:16

There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; their name and memory, though it may flourish for a season among some men, yet it will not last for ever, but will in a little time be worn out; as we see in most of the wise men of former ages, whose very names, together with all their monuments, are utterly lost, as hath been oft observed and bewailed by learned writers in several ages.

As the fool; he must die as certainly as the fool, and after death be as little remembered and honoured.

Ecclesiastes 2:17

I hated life; my life, though accompanied with so much honour, and pleasure, and wisdom, was a burden to me, and I was apt to wish either that I had never been born, or that I might speedily die.

The work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; all human designs and works are so far from yielding me that satisfaction which I expected, that the consideration of them increaseth my discontent.

Ecclesiastes 2:18

I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; all these riches and buildings, and other fruits of my labour, were the matter of

my repentance, and aggravations of my misery, because I must, and that everlastingly, part with them, and leave them all behind me.

Ecclesiastes 2:19

A fool; who will undo all that I have done, and turn the effects of my wisdom into instruments of his folly, and occasions of ruin. Some think he had such an opinion of Rehoboam.

Ecclesiastes 2:20

I gave myself up to despondency, and despair of ever reaping that satisfaction which I promised to myself.

Ecclesiastes 2:21

Whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; who useth great industry, and prudence, and justice too, in the management of his affairs, and therefore might as confidently expect God's blessing, and the comfort of his labours, as any other man.

That hath not laboured therein, so as I have done; who hath spent his days in sloth and folly.

A great evil; a great disorder in itself, and a great disgrace to this world, and a great torment to a considering mind.

Ecclesiastes 2:22

What comfort or benefit remains to any man after this short and frail life is once ended? or, what advantage hath he by all his labours above him who never laboured, and yet enjoyeth all the fruits of his labours?

Ecclesiastes 2:23

For all his days are sorrows; or, *though all his days were sorrows*, i.e. full of sorrows. For this seems added to aggravate the evil mentioned in the foregoing verse. Though he took great and unwearied pains all his days, yet after death he hath no more benefit by it than another man hath.

His travail grief; the toils of his body are, or were, accompanied with the vexations of his mind.

Taketh not rest in the night; either because his mind is distracted, or his sleep broken, with perplexing cares and fears.

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better for a man; or, Is there *any thing better for a man*? which implies that there is nothing better, to wit, for man's

present comfort and satisfaction; this is the chief, and indeed the only, considerable benefit of his labours.

That he should make his soul enjoy good; that he should thankfully take, and freely and cheerfully enjoy, the comforts which God gives him.

That it was from the hand of God; that this also is a singular gift of God, and not to be procured by a man's own wisdom or diligence.

Ecclesiastes 2:25

Who can more freely and fully enjoy the comforts of this life than I did? This verse is added to confirm what he said in the foregoing verse from his own experience, which was the more considerable, because no man ever was a more capable judge of these matters, none could either have more creature-comforts, or more addict himself to the enjoyment of them, or to improve them to better advantage, than he did; and therefore he could best tell what was the greatest good to be found in them, and whether they were able of themselves, without God's special gift, to yield a man satisfaction.

Who else can hasten hereunto, to wit, to the procuring and enjoying of them? who can pursue them with more diligence, or obtain them with more speed and readiness, or embrace them with more greediness and alacrity?

Ecclesiastes 2:26

That is good in his sight; who not only seems to be good to men, as many bad men do, but is really and sincerely good. Or, *who pleaseth him*, as this phrase is rendered, Ecc_7:26, and oft elsewhere; whereby he seems to intimate the reason why he found no more comfort in his labours, because his ways had been very displeasing to God, and therefore God justly denied him that gift. Wisdom and knowledge, to direct him how to use his comforts aright, that so they may be blessings, and not snares and curses to him.

Joy; a thankful and contented mind with his portion.

He giveth travail, to gather and to heap up; he giveth him up to insatiable desires, and wearisome labours, to little or no purpose.

That he may give to him that is good before God; that he may have no comfort in them, but leave them to others, yea, to such as he least

expected or desired, to good and virtuous men, into whose hands his estate falls by the wise and all-disposing providence of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 3

Every thing hath its time; in which, to enjoy it, and therewith do good to others, is our good, Ecc_3:1-13. God doth all according to his decree that we should fear him, and there is nothing new, Ecc_3:14,**15**. The vanity of unjust judgment; God is the great Judge of all, Ecc_3:16,**17**; and he will make men know that they are here but as brute beasts, Ecc_3:18-22.

A season; a certain thee appointed by God for its being and continuance, which no human wit or providence can prevent or alter. And by virtue of this appointment or decree of God, all the vicissitudes and changes which happen in the world, whether comforts or calamities, do come to pass; which is here added, partly, to prove what he last said, Ecc_2:24,**26**, that both the free and comfortable enjoyment of the creatures which some have, and the crosses and vexations which others have with them, are from the hand and counsel of God; partly, to prove the principal proposition of the book, that all things below are vain, and happiness is not to be found in them, because of their great uncertainty, and mutability, and transitoriness, and because they are so much out of the reach and power of men, and wholly in the disposal of another, to wit, God, who doth either give or take them away, either sweeten or embitter them, as it pleaseth him; and partly, to bring the minds of men into a quiet and cheerful dependence upon God's providence, and submission to his will, and a state of preparation for all events.

To every purpose, or *will* , or *desire* , to wit, of man; to all men's designs. attempts, and businesses. Not only natural, but even the free and voluntary actions of men, are ordered and disposed by God to accomplish his own purpose. But it must be considered, that he doth not here speak of a thee allowed by God, wherein all the following things may lawfully be done, which is wholly besides his scope and business; but only of a thee fixed by God, in which they would or should be done.

Ecclesiastes 3:2

A time to die; a certain period unknown to man, but fixed by God, in which a man must unavoidably die; of which see Job_14:5 Joh_13:1.

A time to plant; wherein God inclines a man's heart to planting.

Ecclesiastes 3:3

A time to kill; when a man shall die a violent death, either by chance, as Exo_21:13, or by the sentence of the magistrate, or by the hands of murderers.

A time to heal; when he who seemed to be mortally wounded shall be healed and restored.

A time to break down; when houses shall be demolished, either by the fancy of the owner, or by the rage of other men, or otherwise.

Ecclesiastes 3:4

A time to weep; when men shall have just occasion for weeping and mourning.

Ecclesiastes 3:5

A time to cast away stones; which were brought together in order to the building of a wall or house, but are now cast away, either because the man who gathered them hath changed his mind, and desists from his project, or by other causes or accidents.

A time to embrace; when persons shall enter into friendship, and perform all friendly offices one to another.

A time to refrain from embracing; either through alienation of affections, or grievous calamities. See Joe_2:16 1Co_7:5

Ecclesiastes 3:6

A time to lose; when men shall lose their estates, either by God's providence, or by their own choice.

A time to cast away; when a man shall cast away his goods voluntarily, as in a storm to save his life, as Jon_1:5 Act_27:18,19; or out of love and obedience to God, as Mat_10:37,39 Heb 10:34.

Ecclesiastes 3:7

A time to rend; when men shall rend their garments, as they did in great and sudden griefs, as Gen_37:29 Joe_2:13.

A time to keep silence; wherein men will or shall be silent, either through grief, as Job_2:12,13, or by sickness or weakness, or because God denies a man ability to utter his mind.

Ecclesiastes 3:8

A time to love; when God will stir up the affection of love, or give occasion for the exercise or discovery of it to others.

Ecclesiastes 3:9

Seeing then all actions and events in the world are out of man's power, and no man can at any time do or enjoy any thing at his pleasure, but only what and when God pleaseth, as hath been now shown in many particulars, and it is as true and certain in all others, hence it follows that all men's labours, of themselves, and without God's help and blessing, are unprofitable, and utterly insufficient to make them happy.

Ecclesiastes 3:10

I have seen, I have diligently observed and considered upon this occasion,

the travail, or *the occupation* or *business* , men's various employments, and the differing successes of them,

which God hath given to the sons of men; either,

1. Which God hath imposed upon men as their duty; and therefore men must labour, although it brings them no profit, as was now said. Or,

2. Which God hath inflicted upon mankind as a just punishment for their sins; to which therefore men ought quietly to submit.

To be exercised in it; that hereby they might have constant matter of exercise for their diligence, and patience, and submission to God's will and providence, and for all other graces. Or, *that they might be afflicted or humbled therewith* , as the same phrase is rendered by divers, Ecc_1:13.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: this seems to be added as an apology for God's providence, notwithstanding all the contrary events and confusions which are in the world.

He (i.e. *God* , expressed in the last clause of the verse)

hath made (or *doth make* or *do* , by his providence in the government of the world)

every thing (which he doth either immediately, or by the ministry of men or other creatures, for God worketh in and with all his creatures in all their actions, as is agreed by divines and philosophers)

beautiful (decently and conveniently, so that, all things considered, it could not have been done better) *in his time* ; in the time which he had appointed, or which he saw most proper and fit for it; or, *in its time* or *season* , when it was most fit to be done. Many events seem to men's shallow and perverse judgments, at least for a time, to be very irregular and unbecoming, as when wicked men prosper in their impious and unrighteous enterprises, and good men are sorely oppressed and afflicted, and that for righteousness' sake; but when men shall come thoroughly to understand God's works, and the whole frame and contexture of them, and to see the end of them, they will then say that all things were done most wisely and most seasonably; whereof we have eminent instances in Joseph, and David, and Mordecai, and the Jews of his time.

He hath set the world in their heart, i.e. in the hearts of men, as the following words show, where man is expressed. The sense is either,

1. Although all God's works are beautiful, yet men do not discern the beauty of them, because the world is in their hearts; their minds are so busied and distracted with the thoughts, and cares, and love, and business of this world, that they have neither leisure nor heart seriously to study God's works. But this inordinate love of the present world comes from man's own corruption, and not from God; and therefore it seems harsh to impute it to God, and improbable that Solomon would have phrased it thus, that *God hath set or put the world* i.e. worldly lusts, in men's *hearts* . Or,

2. As God's works are beautiful in themselves, so men are capable of discerning the beauty of them, because God hath set the world in men's hearts; he hath exposed the world, and all his dispensations in the world, unto the view of men's minds; both because he hath wrought his works so evidently and publicly, that men might easily observe them; and because he hath given men reason whereby they may discover the wisdom and beauty of all God's works, if they diligently apply themselves to the study of them.

So that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end: so this is another reason why men do not discern

the beauty of God's works, because they do not see the whole frame or course of them from the beginning to the end, but only some small parcels or fragments of them; the eminent works of God being oft begun in one age, and finished in another. Or, yet *so that* , &c. or, *except that* (as this phrase properly signifies, and is elsewhere used) *no man can find out* , &c. Thus it is an exception to the next foregoing clause, and the sense is, It is true God hath put the world into men's hearts, or made them capable of observing all events and dispensations of God in the world; but this is to be understood with a limitation, because there are some more mysterious works of God which no man can fully understand, because he cannot search them out through or from the beginning to the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:12

I know, by clear reason, and my own long and certain experience,

that there is no good, no other satisfaction or felicity which a man can enjoy, in them, in creatures or worldly enjoyments. *To do good* ; either,

1. To himself, as it is fully expressed, Psa_49:18. Or,
2. To others; to employ them in acts of charity and liberality towards others. Or,
3. Towards God; to use them, and to live in the fear of God, which is necessary to the happiness of this as well as of the other life.

Ecclesiastes 3:13

That every man should eat and drink, i.e. hath power or a heart to use what God hath given him, as it is expressed, Ecc_6:2.

It is the gift of God; of which See Poole "Ecc_2:24".

Ecclesiastes 3:14

Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; all God's counsels or decrees are eternal and unchangeable, and his providence works effectually, so as men cannot resist or hinder it.

Nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; men can neither do any thing besides or against God's counsel and providence, nor hinder any work or act of it.

That men should fear before him; not that men should make this an occasion of despair, or idleness, or dissoluteness, as some abuse this doctrine, but that, by the consideration of his sovereign and irresistible

power in the disposal of all persons and things as pleaseth him, men should learn to trust in him, to submit to him, to fear to offend or rebel against him, and more carefully and industriously to study to please him.

Ecclesiastes 3:15

That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; things past, present, and to come, are all of the same nature, and all ordered in the same manner by one constant counsel and settled course in all parts and ages of the world. There is a continual return of the same motions and influences of the heavenly bodies, of the same seasons of the year, and a constant succession of new generations of men and beasts, but all of the same quality. The same thing in substance was said before, Ecc_1:9.

Requireth, i.e. reneweth, as this word is used, Job_3:4.

That which is past; that time and those things which are irrecoverably gone in themselves, but are as it were recalled, because others of the same kind arise and come in their stead. Heb. *that which is driven away* with a mighty, force, as time present is violently thrust away by that which comes after it.

Ecclesiastes 3:16

This is mentioned, either,

1. As another vanity, to wit, the vanity of honour and power, which is so oft an instrument of injustice and oppression. Or rather,
2. As another argument of the vanity of worldly things, or a hinderance of that comfort which men expect in this life, because they are oppressed by their rulers.

I saw; I perceived it by information from others, and by my own observation.

The place of judgment; in the thrones of princes and tribunals of magistrates, where judgment should be duly executed.

Wickedness was there; judgment was perverted, the guilty acquitted, and the innocent condemned.

The place of righteousness; in which righteousness should be found and should dwell, if it were banished from all other places.

Ecclesiastes 3:17

I said in mine heart, mine heart was sorely grieved at this disorder, but I quieted it with this consideration,

God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; absolving and saving the just, and condemning the wicked.

A time, fixed by God's unalterable decree. He implies, that as this life is the sinner's time in which he doth whatsoever seemeth good in his own eyes, so God will have his time to reckon with them, and rectify all these disorders.

There; in the presence or at the judgment-seat of God; which is easily understood out of the foregoing words, the relative being put for the antecedent, as it is Num_7:89 Est_9:25 Job_1:21 Psa_14:5 **114:2**. Or it may be rendered then, as this particle is used, Psa_14:5 Hos_2:15, and as it is usual in other authors for adverbs of place to be put for adverbs of time.

For every purpose, and for every work; for the examining and judging, not only all men's practices or open actions, but also all their secret thoughts and purposes; all the evil which they either did, or designed, or desired, or endeavoured to do. The design of this verse is partly to strike a terror into oppressing potentates, and partly to satisfy the doubts and support the spirits of good men, who are oppressed in this life.

Ecclesiastes 3:18

I said in my heart; and further I considered with myself.

Concerning the estate of the sons of men; concerning their condition and deportment in this present world.

That God might manifest them; God suffers these horrible disorders among men, expressed Ecc_3:16, that he might discover men to themselves, and by permitting these actions show what strange creatures they are, and what vile hearts they have, which men would not otherwise understand or believe. See 2Ki_8:13,14.

That they themselves are beasts, Heb. *that they are beasts to themselves* ; either,

1. One to another, devouring and destroying one another. Or,

2. In their own judgment, or themselves being judges; that although God made them men or reasonable creatures, yet they have made themselves beasts by their brutish practices; and that men, considered only with respect unto the present life, which is the only thing valued and regarded by most men, and the vanity whereof is the principal subject of this book, are as vain and miserable creatures as the beasts themselves, the great differences between men and beasts being such as respect the other life. For men seem here to be called beasts in both these respects, and the latter he prosecutes more largely in the following verses.

Ecclesiastes 3:19

Befalleth beasts; they are subject to the same diseases, pains, and casualties.

So dieth the other; as certainly, and no less painfully.

One breath; one breath of life, which is in their nostrils; one and the same living soul, by which the beasts perform the same vital and animal operations. For he speaks not here of man's rational and immortal spirit, nor of the future life.

A man hath no pre-eminence above a beast, in respect of the present life and sensible things. Nay, the beasts have quicker senses than men, and therefore enjoy more pleasure in those things, and that with less dangers and mischief, than men do.

Ecclesiastes 3:20

All go unto one place; to the earth, as it is expressed, Ecc_3:21, out of which they were both taken.

All turn to dust again; which is meant only of their bodies, as it is explained, Ecc_12:7.

Ecclesiastes 3:21

It might be objected, that the conditions of men and beasts are vastly differing, because man's spirit goeth upward to God, Ecc_12:7, but the spirit of a beast goeth downward, together with its body, and perisheth with it. To this he answers, *Who knoweth this ?* which is not to be understood as if no man did know it, or as if the thing were utterly uncertain and unknown, for he knew it, and positively affirms it, Ecc_12:7; but that few know it; as the same manner of expression is understood, Pro_31:10, *Who can find ?* Isa_53:1, *Who hath believed ?*

&c.; which note the scarcity or difficulty, but not the nullity or impossibility of the thing. Besides, he seems here to speak not so much of a speculative as of a practical knowledge, as such words are most commonly used. Who considers or regards this, or layeth it to heart? True it is, there is such a difference, which also is known and believed by wise and good men; but the generality of mankind never mind it; their hearts are wholly set upon this life, and upon present and sensible things, and they place all their hopes and happiness in them, and take no thought nor care for the things of the future and invisible world. And as to them with whom Solomon hath to do in this matter, the argument is strong and good, being, as logicians call it, an argument to the man; and there is no considerable difference between sensual men and beasts, because their affections are set upon the same objects, and both of them are partakers of the same sensual satisfactions, and subject to the same sensual pains and miseries, and their hopes and felicity perish together, to wit, at death, and therefore such men are no more happy than the beasts that perish. Others understand it thus, *Who knoweth this* ? to wit, by sense or experience, or merely by his own reason, or without the help of Divine revelation. But, with the leave of so many worthy interpreters, and with submission to better judgments, the former seems to be the truer sense.

Ecclesiastes 3:22

There is nothing better, to wit, for a man's present satisfaction, and the happiness of this life, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; that he comfortably enjoy what God hath given him, and not disquiet himself with cares about future events. He seems to speak this, not in the person of an epicure, but as his own judgment, which also he declareth, Ecc_2:24 **5:18,19 8:15**.

That is his portion; this is the benefit of his labours; he hath no more than he useth, for what he leaveth behind him is not his, but another man's.

Who shall bring him to see what shall be after him? when once he is dead he shall never return into this life to see into whose hands his estate falls, and how it is either used or abused; nor is he at all concerned in those matters.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 4

The vanity of oppression, by reason of which the dead and the unborn are better than the living, Ecc_4:1-3. Of envy, sloth, quarrel, Ecc_4:4-6. Of covetousness and selfishness, Ecc_4:7,**8**. The advantage of society and friendship, Ecc_4:9-12. The poor better than foolish kings, Ecc_4:13. He is advanced, whilst one born king is made poor, Ecc_4:14. The people never contented, but rejoicing in changes, Ecc_4:15,**16**.

I considered again more seriously

all the oppressions that are done under the sun, whether by supreme magistrates or judges, of which he spake Ecc_3:16, or by any other potent persons.

They had no comforter; none afforded them either pity or succour, either out of a selfish and barbarous disposition, or for fear of exposing themselves thereby to the same injuries.

There was power, both in themselves, and because most men were ready to join with the strongest and safest side. So they were utterly unable to deliver themselves, and, as it follows, none else could or would do it.

They had no comforter; which is repeated as an argument both of the great inhumanity of men towards others in calamity, and of the extreme misery of oppressed persons.

Ecclesiastes 4:2

I praised; I judged them more happy, or less miserable; which he seems to deliver not only as the judgment of the flesh, or of the sense, or of men in misery, as this is commonly understood, but as his own judgment. For this is most true and certain, that setting aside the advantage which this life gives him for the concerns of the future life, which Solomon doth not meddle with in the present debate, and considering the uncertainty, and vanity, and manifold vexations of mind, and outward calamities of the present life, a wise man would not account it worth his while to live, and would choose death rather than life. *The dead which are already dead* ; those which are quite dead; who possibly are here opposed to them that, in respect of their deplorable and desperate condition, are even whilst they live called dead men, Isa_26:19, and said to *die daily* , 1Co_15:31.

The living which are yet alive; which languish under their pressures, of whom we can only say, as we use to speak of dying men, They are alive, and that is all.

Ecclesiastes 4:3

Which hath not yet been; who was never born. How this is true, see on the foregoing verse.

Not seen, i.e. not felt; for as *seeing good* is put for enjoying it, Ecc_2:24, so seeing evil is put for suffering it, as hath been more than once observed.

Ecclesiastes 4:4

Every right work; all the worthy designs and complete works of wise and virtuous men.

Is envied of his neighbour; instead of that honour and recompence which he deserves, he meets with nothing but envy and obloquy, and many evil fruits thereof.

Ecclesiastes 4:5

Foldeth his hands together; is careless and idle, which is the signification of this gesture, Pro_6:10 **19:24 26:15**. Perceiving that diligence is attended with envy, Ecc_4:4, he, like a fool, runs into the other extreme.

Eateth his own flesh; wasteth his substance, and bringeth himself to poverty, whereby his very flesh pineth away for want of bread, and he is reduced to skin and bone; and if he have any flesh left, he is ready to eat it through extremity of hunger.

Ecclesiastes 4:6

These are the words, either,

1. Of the sluggard making this apology for his idleness, that his little with ease, is better than great riches got with much trouble. Or,
2. Of Solomon, who elsewhere speaks to the same purpose, as Pro_15:16, **17 17:1**, and here proposeth it as a good antidote against the vanity of immoderate cares and labours for worldly goods, against which he industriously directs his speeches in divers places of this book; and particularly as a seasonable precaution against the sin of covetousness, of which he speaks in the following passage.

Ecclesiastes 4:7

No text from Poole on this verse.

Ecclesiastes 4:8

One alone; either,

1. Who lives by himself, as grudging that any ether should partake of his provisions. Or rather,

2. Who hath none but himself to care and labour for, as the next words explain it.

He hath neither child nor brother, to whom he may leave his vast estate.

Yet is there no end of all his labour; he lives in perpetual restlessness and excessive toils.

His eye, i.e. his covetous mind or desire, fitly expressed by *the eye* , partly because that is the incentive of this sin, Jos_7:21; and partly because he hath no good by his riches, saving the beholding of them with his eyes, as it is affirmed, Ecc_5:11, compared with Ecc_2:10 1Jo_2:16. Neither saith he, within himself; he considers nothing but how he may get more and more. For whom do I labour? having no posterity nor kindred to enjoy it, as was now said. Shall I take all this pains for a stranger, possibly for an enemy, who will reap the fruit of all my labours? *Bereave my soul of good* ; deity myself those comforts and conveniencies which God hath allowed unto me.

A sore travail; a dreadful judgment and misery as well as a great sin.

Ecclesiastes 4:9

Two, who live together in any kind of society, and join their powers together in any enterprises; which he opposeth to that humour of the covetous man, who desired to live alone, as was now said.

A good reward for their labour; both have great benefit by such combinations and conjunctions of their counsels and abilities, whereby they do exceedingly support, and encourage, and strengthen one another, and effect many things which neither of them alone could do.

Ecclesiastes 4:10

They; one of them, the plural being put for the singular, as Jon_1:5 Mat_21:7 1Ti_2:15. Or both of them successively.

Fall, in any kind, into any mistakes and errors, or sins, or dangers and distresses.

Will lift up his fellow; hold him up if he be falling, or raise him up if he be fallen.

Ecclesiastes 4:11

They have heat; they will be sooner warm in a cold bed and cold season.

How can one be warm alone? not so soon nor so thoroughly.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Against him; against either of them.

A threefold cord is not quickly broken; if a man have not only one, but two or more friends, he is so much the safer and the happier.

Ecclesiastes 4:13

Better; more happy. Now he proceeds to another vanity, even that of honour and power, and of the highest places.

A poor child; who is doubly contemptible, both for his age, and for his poverty.

An old king; venerable both for his age and gravity, and for his royal dignity. So that the comparison is made with the greatest disadvantage that may be.

Who will no more be admonished; who hath neither wisdom to govern himself, nor to receive the counsels or admonitions of wiser men, but is foolish, and wilful, and incorrigible.

Ecclesiastes 4:14

Out of prison, into which he was cast for his poverty and debt, he, the poor and wise child,

cometh to reign; is oftentimes advanced by his wisdom to the highest power and dignity; which was the case of Joseph, and Mordecai, and many others.

He that is born in his kingdom, that old king, who was born of the royal race, and had possessed his kingdom for a long time,

becometh poor; is deprived of his kingdom, either by the rebellion of his subjects provoked by his folly, or by the power of some other and wiser prince.

Ecclesiastes 4:15

I considered all the living; the general disposition or humour of common people in all kingdoms, that they are fickle and inconstant, weary of their old governors, and desirous of changes.

Which walk under the sun: this is a periphrasis, or description of living and mortal men, like that Ecc_7:11, that see the sun.

With the second child: these words may be joined either,

1. With those *which walk* , or, that they walk under the sun, (i.e. upon the earth,) *with the second child* , i.e. follow, and favour, and worship him as the rising sun, upon whom the eyes and hopes of most people are fixed. Or,

2. With the first words,

I considered all the living which walk under the sun, i.e. the temper of all subjects or people, together

with the condition of the second child; which may be understood either,

1. In general, of a king's *child* , or son and heir, who is called *second* , in respect of his father, whose successor he is to be. Or,

2. That wise and poor child mentioned Ecc_4:13, who is said to *come to reign* , Ecc_4:14, and may well be called *the second* to the old and foolish king *who became poor* , Ecc_4:15, being deposed from his kingdom, whom he succeeds, being put in his place either by the humour of the people, or by some higher power.

Stand up, i.e. arise to reign, as that phrase signifies, Dan_8:22,23 11:2,3,7,20,21.

Ecclesiastes 4:16

There is no end of all the people: the sense is either,

1. The people which have this humour are without end, or innumerable, as this phrase signifies, Job_22:5 Isa_2:7 9:7. Or,

2. This humour of the common people hath no end, but passeth from one generation to another; they ever were, and are, and will be unstable and restless, and given to change; which sense the following words seem to favour.

Before them; either,

1. Before the two kings above mentioned, the father and the son, or the predecessor and successor. All those who stood or desired to stand in their presence, and waited upon them, as this phrase is used, 2Sa_16:19 1Ki_10:8. Or rather,

2. Before the present generation of subjects, who earnestly desired and promoted the change of government here expressed; for these are evidently opposed to *them that come after*, which all interpreters understand of the people, not of the kings. And so here are three generations of people noted, the authors of the present change, and their parents, and their children, and all are observed to have the same inclinations in these matters.

Shall not rejoice in him; they shall be as weary of the successor, though a wise and worthy prince, as their parents were of his foolish predecessor; the reason whereof is partly from that itch of novelty and curiosity which is natural and common to mankind, and partly from their vain and foolish hopes of advantage from such changes.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 5

Vanities in divine matters, Ecc_5:1-7. In murmuring and repining, Ecc_5:8. In riches and covetousness. Ecc_5:9,**10**; for riches rob men of ease, Ecc_5:11,**12**, procure their death, Ecc_5:13, fly away, Ecc_5:14, cannot be carried with them into the grave, Ecc_5:15-17. A contented life best: this is the gift of God, Ecc_5:18-20.

The seven first verses of this chapter are inserted partly as the only effectual remedy against all the foregoing vanities, and partly as a caution to take heed of bringing vanity into the service of God, or of worshipping God vainly and foolishly.

Keep thy foot; the feet of thy soul, which are the thoughts and affections, by which men go to God, and walk or converse with him. Make straight steps. See that your hearts be purged from sin, and prepared and furnished with all graces or necessary qualifications, as good intention, reverence, humility, &c. It is a metaphor from one that walketh in a very slippery path, in which there needs more than ordinary care to keep him from falling.

The house of God; the place of God's solemn and public worship, whether the temple or synagogue.

Be more ready, Heb. *more near* , more forward and inclinable. Prefer this duty before the following.

To hear; to hearken to and obey God's word, there read and preached by the priests or prophets; for hearing is very frequently put in Scripture for obeying.

The sacrifice of fools; such as foolish and wicked men use to offer, who vainly think to please God with the multitude and costliness of their sacrifices without true piety or obedience.

They consider not that they do evil; they are not sensible of the great sinfulness of such thoughts and practices, but, like fools, think they do God good service; which is implied, as is usual in such expressions.

Ecclesiastes 5:2

Be not rash with thy mouth; speak not without good understanding and due consideration.

Let not thine heart be hasty; do not give way to every sudden motion of thine heart, nor suffer it to break out of thy lips till thou hast well weighed it.

To utter any thing before God; either,

1. In prayers directed to him. Or,
2. In solemn vows and promises made in God's presence; which were very much in use in those times, and of which he speaks in the following verses, where he presseth us to pay our vows when we have made them, as here he seems to caution us in making them.

God is in heaven; is a God of infinite majesty, not to be despised or abused; of infinite holiness, not to be polluted or offended; of infinite knowledge. observing all our words and carriages, not to be deceived.

Thou upon earth; thou art a poor earth-worm, infinitely below him, and therefore shouldst stand in awe of him, and fear to offend him.

Let thy words be few; either

1. In prayer. Use not vain repetitions nor multitude of words in prayer, as if they were necessary to inform God of thy state, or to prevail with God to grant thy requests, or as if thou shouldst certainly be heard upon that very account, as Christ also cautions us, Mat_6:7. For otherwise it is not unlawful, nay, sometimes it is a duty, to use long prayers, and

consequently many words, and to repeat the same words in prayer, as is manifest from Neh_9:3 Dan_9:18,19 Mt 26:44 Luk_6:12, and many other places. Or,

2. In vowing. Be not too prodigal in making more vows and promises than thou art either able or willing and resolved to perform, remembering that God looks down from heaven, and heareth all thy vows, and expects a punctual accomplishment of them. **See Poole "Ecc_5:3"**.

Ecclesiastes 5:3

When men's minds are distracted and oppressed with too much business in the day, they dream of it in the night.

A fool's voice is known; it discovers the man to be a foolish, and rash, and inconsiderate man.

By multitude of words; either,

1. In prayer. Or,

2. In vowing, i.e. by making many rash vows, of which he speaks in Ecc_5:4-6, and then returns to the mention of *multitude of dreams and many words* , Ecc_5:7, which verse may be a comment upon this, and which makes it probable that both that and this verse are to be understood of vows rather than of prayers.

Ecclesiastes 5:4

A vow; which is a solemn promise, whereby a man binds himself to do something which is in his power to do.

Defer not to pay it; perform it whilst the sense of thine obligation is fresh and strong upon thee, lest either thou seem to repent of thy promises, or lest delays end in denials and resolutions of non-performance. See Num_30:2 Deu_23:21 Psa_66:13,14 **66:11**.

In fools; in hypocritical and perfidious persons, who, when they are in distress, make liberal vows, and when the danger is past, neglect and break them; whom he calls *fools* , partly because it is the highest folly to despise and provoke, to think to mock and deceive, the all-seeing and almighty God; and partly in opposition to the contrary opinion of such persons, who think they deal wisely and cunningly in serving themselves of God, by getting the advantage or deliverance which they desire by making such vows, and yet avoiding the inconvenience and

charge of payment when once the work is done, whereas nothing is more impious or ridiculous than such an imagination.

Ecclesiastes 5:5

That thou shouldest not vow; for this was no sin, because men are free to make such vows, or not to make them, as they think fit. See Num_30:3, &c.; Deu_23:22 Act_5:4. But having vowed we cannot forbear payment of them without sin.

Ecclesiastes 5:6

Suffer not thy mouth, by uttering any rash or foolish vow.

Thy flesh, i. e. thyself, the word flesh being oft put for the whole man, as Gen_6:12 Isa_40:5 Rom_3:20, &c. And it seems to have some emphasis here, and to intimate either,

1. That such vows were made upon fleshly or carnal, and not upon spiritual and religious motives. Or rather,
2. That *the flesh* or corrupt nature of man, which is oft called *flesh*, was exceeding prone to set itself at ease and liberty from such bonds, and to neglect the chargeable duties of religion.

The angel; either,

1. The blessed angels, the singular number being put for the plural, who are present in the public assemblies in which these vows were generally paid, Psa_66:13, where they observe both the matter and manner of men's religious performances, as appears from 1Co_11:10, who as they rejoice in the conversion of a sinner, Luk_15:10, so are displeased with the sins of men, and especially such as are committed in or against the worship of God. Or,
2. Christ, who in the Old Testament is frequently called an *angel*, as hath been oft noted before, and the *Angel of the covenant*, Mal_3:1 because even then he acted as God's messenger, appearing and speaking to the patriarchs and prophets in his Father's name, as a prosignification of his future incarnation, and who is and was in a special manner present in all religious assemblies; and being omniscient and omnipresent, exactly knew and observed all the vows which men made, and whether they did perform or violate them. Or rather,

3. The priest or minister of holy things, who was to require of the people the payment of their vows, to whom all sacrifices for sins of ignorance or errors about vows or other things were to be brought, Lev_5:4,5. For such persons are oft called *angels* , or, as this Hebrew word is commonly rendered, *messengers* , as Job_33:23 Mal_2:7 Rev_1:20. And this title seems to be given to the priest here, not without some emphasis, because the vow made to God was paid to the priest as one standing and acting in God's name and stead, and it belonged to the priest, as God's angel or ambassador, to discharge persons from their vows when there was just occasion so to do.

That it was an error; I did foolishly and unadvisedly in making such a vow, and therefore I hope God will excuse me, and instead of that which I had vowed, accept of a sacrifice for my ignorance, according to the law for sins of ignorance, Lev_4:2 **5:15** Num_15:26.

Wherefore should God be angry, why wilt thou provoke God to anger, at thy voice? either,

1. At the vows which thou hast hastily uttered with thy mouth, as he said above. Or rather,
2. At these frivolous excuses, wherewith thou deludest thy own conscience, and vainly imaginest that thou canst deceive God himself.

Destroy the work of thine hands; blast all thy contrivances, and labours, and estate gotten by thy labours, and particularly that work or enterprise for the success whereof thou didst make these vows, which being, as thou thinkest, finished, thou refusest to pay thy vows; but know that God can quickly undo that which thou hast done, and plentifully repay thine indignities and injuries offered to him into thine own bosom.

Ecclesiastes 5:7

There is a great deal of vanity and folly, as in

multitude of dreams, which for the most part are vain and insignificant, so also *in many words* , i.e. in making many vows, whereby a man is exposed to many snares and temptations.

Fear thou God; fear the offence and wrath of God, and therefore be sparing in making vows, and just in performing them; whereby he implies that this rashness in vowing, and slackness in performing vows,

proceed from the want of a just reverence and dread of the Divine Majesty, who is immediately concerned in these matters.

Ecclesiastes 5:8

Here is an account of another vanity, and a sovereign antidote against it.

Marvel not, as if it were inconsistent with God's wisdom, and justice, and truth to suffer such disorders, or a just cause for any man to throw off that fear and service of God which I have now commended to thee.

He that is higher than the highest, the most high God, who is infinitely above the greatest of men, and therefore, if he saw meet, could crush them in an instant,

regardeth, not like an idle spectator, but like a judge, who diligently observes and records all these miscarriages, and will so effectually punish them, that neither they shall have any cause of triumph in their former successes, nor good men to be grieved at the remembrance of them.

There be higher than they; either,

1. The high and holy angels, who are employed by God in the government of kings and kingdoms, as we read in the Book of Daniel, and elsewhere, and for the defence of God's people, Psa_34:7 **91:11** Heb_1:14. Or,

2. God; and so it is an emphatical repetition of the same thing, which is frequent in Scripture; there is *a higher than they* . Or, as the words are by others fitly rendered, *the Most High* (for plural words are oft understood of God singularly) *is above them* , and therefore can control them, and will certainly call them to an account.

Ecclesiastes 5:9

The profit of the earth, the fruits procured from the earth by the skill and labour of the husbandman, is for all; are necessary and beneficial to all men whatsoever. The wise man, after some interruption, returns to his former subject, to discourse of the vanity of great riches, one argument or evidence whereof he seems to mention in this verse, to wit, that the poor labourer enjoyeth the fruits of the earth as well as the greatest monarch, and that the richest man in the world depends as much upon them as the poorest.

Is served by the field; is supported by the fruits of the field; or, as many others render it, *serves* or *is a servant to the field*, depends upon it, is obliged to see that his fields be tilled and dressed, that he may have subsistence for himself, and for his servants and subjects.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

The greatest treasures of silver do not satisfy the covetous possessor of it; partly because his mind is insatiable, and his desires are increased by and with gains; partly because silver of itself cannot satisfy his natural desires and necessities as the fruits of the field can do, and the miserable wretch grudgeth to part with his silver, though it be to purchase things needful and convenient for him.

That loveth abundance; or, that loveth it (to wit, silver) in abundance; that desires and lays up great treasures.

Ecclesiastes 5:11

They are increased that eat them; they require and are more commonly attended with a numerous company of servants, and friends, and retinues to consume them; which is a great torment to a covetous man, of whom he here speaks.

What good is there to the owners thereof? what benefit hath he above others, who feed upon his provisions, and enjoy the same comforts which he doth, without his fears, and cares, and troubles about them?

The beholding of them with their eyes; either,

1. With a reflection upon his propriety in them. Or,
2. With unlimited freedom. He can go and look upon his bags or chests of silver as long and as oft as he pleaseth, whereas other men are seldom admitted to that prospect, and see only some few of the fruits or purchases of it.

Ecclesiastes 5:12

Is sweet; because he is free from those cares and fears, wherewith the minds of rich men are oft distracted, and their sleep disturbed.

Whether he eat little, then his weariness disposeth him to sleep, or much, in which case his healthful constitution and laborious course of life prevents those crudities and indigestions which oftentimes break the sleep of rich men.

The abundance, Heb. *the fulness* , either,

1. Of his diet, which commonly discomposeth their stomachs, and hinders their rest; or,

2. Of wealth, which is commonly attended with many perplexing cares, which disquiet men both by day and by night. The Hebrew word is used in Scripture both ways, and possibly it is thus generally expressed to include both significations.

Ecclesiastes 5:13

Because they frequently are the instruments and occasions both of their present and eternal destruction, as they feed their pride or luxury, or other hurtful lusts, which waste the body, and shorten the life, and damn the soul; and as they are great temptations to tyrants or thieves, yea, sometimes to relations, or servants, or others, to take away their lives, that they may get their riches.

Ecclesiastes 5:14

But, or *for* , or *or* , or *moreover* ; for this particle is so rendered by divers others, both here and in other places of Scripture.

Those riches perish: if they be kept, it is to the owner's hurt; and if not, they are lost to his grief.

By evil travail; by some wicked practices, either his own, or of other men; or by some secret hand of God cursing all his enterprises.

There is nothing in his hand; either,

1. In the father's power to leave to his son, for whose sake he underwent all those hard labours; which is a great aggravation of his grief and misery. Or,

2. In the son's possession after his father's death.

Ecclesiastes 5:15

Return to go into the womb or belly of the earth, the common mother of all mankind. **See Poole "Job_1:21"**, **See Poole "Ecc_12:7"**. And *return to go* , is put for *return and go* ; and *going* is here put for *dying* , as Job_16:22 Psa_39:13. This is another vanity: if his estate be neither lost, nor kept to his hurt, but enjoyed by him with safety and comfort all his days, yet when he dies he must leave it behind him, and cannot carry one handful of it with him into another world.

Ecclesiastes 5:16

This also, which I have last mentioned and shall now repeat. *For the wind* ; for riches, which are empty and unsatisfying, uncertain and transitory, fleeing away swiftly and strongly, Pro_23:5, which no man can hold or stay in its course, all which are the properties of the wind. Compare Pro_11:29 Hos_12:1.

Ecclesiastes 5:17

All his days, to wit, of his life,

also he eateth in darkness; he hath no comfort in his estate, but even when he eats, when other men relax their minds, and use freedom and cheerfulness, he doth it with anxiety and discontent, as grudging even at his own necessary expenses, and tormenting himself with cares about getting, and disposing, and keeping his estate.

He hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness; when he falls sick, and presageth or feareth his death, he is filled with rage, because he is cut off before he hath accomplished his designs, and because he must leave that wealth and world in which all his hopes and happiness lie, and must go to give up a doleful account to his Judge of all his actions and acquisitions.

Ecclesiastes 5:18

That which I have seen, i.e. learned by study and experience.

Good and comely; good or comfortable to man's self, and comely or amiable in the eyes of other men, as penuriousness is base and dishonourable.

His portion, to wit, of worldly goods; for he hath another and a better portion in heaven. This liberty is given to him by God, and this is the best advantage, as to this life, which he can make of them.

Ecclesiastes 5:19

Hath given him power, Heb. *hath given him the dominion* ; who is the lord and master of his estate, not a slave to it. Of this and the former verse, **See Poole "Ecc_2:24"**; **See Poole "Ecc_3:12"**, **See Poole "Ecc_3:13"**. *To take his portion to his own use* , to use what God hath given him.

Ecclesiastes 5:20

He shall not much remember; so as to disquiet or vex himself therewith.

The days; either,

1. The troubles; days being here put for evil or sad days, by a usual synecdoche, as Job_18:20 Psa_137:7 **Ob 12 Mic 7:4.** Or,

2. The time in general; which is irksome and tedious to men oppressed with discontent or misery, who usually reckon every hour or minute that passeth, and have their minds and thoughts constantly fixed upon the vanity and uncertainty of this life, upon the afflictions which they have already endured and may further expect; whereas to men of contented and cheerful minds the time is short and sweet, and passeth over them before they are aware of it, and they enjoy their present comforts without perplexing themselves about former or future events.

Answereth him; answereth, either,

1. His labours with success, as money is said to *answer all things* , Ecc_10:19, because it is equivalent to all, and able to purchase all things. Or,

2. His desires. In the joy of his heart; in giving him that solid joy and comfort of his labours which his heart expected and desired.

Ecclesiastes 6:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 6

The vanity of riches without use, Ecc_6:1,**2.** Of children and old age without competent wealth; their obscurity is worse than not to have been, Ecc_6:3-6. All labour is for necessities of life, which one getteth as well as another, Ecc_6:7,**8.** It is good for us to enjoy what we have, and not to desire what we have not; for our portion is appointed its; and we ourselves are vain; and other things do but increase our vanity, Ecc_6:9-12.

No text from Poole on this verse.

Ecclesiastes 6:2

Wealth; all sorts of riches, as gold and silver, cattle and lands, &c.

Of all that he desireth; which he doth or can reasonably desire.

Giveth him not power to eat; either because they are suddenly taken away from him by the hand and curse of God, and given to others; or because God gives him up to a base and covetous mind, which is both a sin and a place. *Thereof* , i.e. any considerable part of it; whereas the

stranger eateth not thereof, but it, i.e. all of it; devoureth it all in an instant.

Ecclesiastes 6:3

An hundred children, i.e. very many children, to whom he intends to leave his estate.

Live many years; which is the chief thing that he desires, and which giveth him opportunity of increasing his estate vastly.

The days; he saith days, because the years of men's life are but few.

Be not filled with good; hath not a contented mind and comfortable enjoyment of his estate whilst he lives. *Have no burial* ; and if after his death he hath either none, or a mean and dishonourable burial, because his sordid and covetous carriage made him hateful and contemptible to all persons, his children and heirs not excepted, and he was by all sorts of men thought unworthy of any testimonies of honour, either in his life or after his death. Thus he describes a man who lives miserably, and dies ignominiously.

An untimely birth; which as it never enjoyed the comforts, so it never felt the calamities, of this life, which are far more considerable than its comforts, at least to a man that denied himself the comforts, and plunged himself into the toils and vexations, of this life.

Ecclesiastes 6:4

For; or rather, *although* , as this particle is frequently rendered. For this verse seems to contain not so much a reason of what he last said, *that an untimely birth is better than he* , as an answer to an exception which might be made against it. Although all that is here said be true of the abortive, yet it is better than he. *He* ; either,

1. The covetous man. Or rather,
2. The abortive; of whom alone, and not of the former, that passage is true, he hath not seen the sun, Ecc_6:5. *Cometh in* ; into the world, this word being oft put for a man's being born, as Job_1:21 Ecc_5:15. *With vanity* ; or, *in vain* , to no purpose; without any comfort or benefit by it, which also is in a great measure the case of the covetous wretch.

Departeth in darkness; dieth obscurely, without any observation or regard of men.

Shall be covered with darkness; shall be speedily and utterly forgotten; whereas the name of such wicked men shall rot, and be remembered to their shame.

Ecclesiastes 6:5

He hath not seen the sun; he never beheld the light, and therefore it is not grievous to him to want it; whereas the covetous man saw that light was very pleasant, and therefore the loss of it was irksome to him.

Nor known any thing; hath had no knowledge, sense, or experience of any thing, whether good or evil.

Hath more rest, because he is perfectly free from all those encumbrances and vexatious to which the covetous man is long exposed.

Ecclesiastes 6:6

Live a thousand years twice told; wherein he seems to have a privilege above an untimely birth. *Hath he seen no good* ; he hath enjoyed little or no comfort in it, and therefore long life is rather a curse and mischief than a blessing or advantage to him.

Do not all, whether born out of and before their time, or in due time, whether their lives be long or short,

go to one place; to the grave. And so after a little time all are alike as to this life, of which he here speaks; and as to the other life, his condition is infinitely worse than that of an untimely birth.

Ecclesiastes 6:7

For his mouth; for meat to put into his mouth, that he may get food; and as bread is oft put for all food, so food is put for all necessary provisions for this life, as Pro_30:8, and elsewhere; whereof this is the chief, for which a man will sell his house and lands, yea, the very garments upon his back.

Is not filled: although all that a man can go: by his labours is but necessary food, which the meanest sort of men commonly enjoy, as is observed in the next verse; yet such is the vanity of this world, and the folly of mankind, that men are insatiable in their desires, and restless in their endeavours, after more and more, and never say they have enough.

Ecclesiastes 6:8

The fool, to wit, in these matters. Both are equally subject to the same calamities, and partakers of the same comforts of this life.

Before the living, to wit, before the poor, that doth not know this; which words are easily understood by comparing this clause with the former. And such defects are usual, both in Scripture and other authors, as hath been formerly noted, by a figure which the learned call *anantapodoton* . And by this phrase, that knoweth, &c., he means such a poor man who is ingenious and industrious; who is fit for service and business, and knows how to carry himself towards rich men, so as to deserve and gain their favour, and to procure a livelihood.

Ecclesiastes 6:9

The sight of the eyes, i.e. the comfortable enjoyment of what a man hath; for seeing is oft put for enjoying, as Psa_34:12 Ecc_2:1 **3:13**, &c.

The wandering of the desire; restless and insatiable desires of what a man hath not, wherewith covetous rich men are perpetually haunted and tormented.

This, this wandering of the desire wherein most men indulge themselves,

is also vanity and vexation of spirit; is not the way to satisfaction, as they imagine, but to vexation.

Ecclesiastes 6:10

This verse is added either as a proof of what he last said concerning the vanity and wandering of insatiable desires, or as a timber instance of the vanity of all things in this life.

That which hath been (or, *is* , for the Hebrew verb) may be rendered either way, to wit, man considered with all his endowments and enjoyments, whether he be wise or foolish, rich or poor; man, who is the chief of all visible and sublunary beings, for whom they all were made) *is named already* , to wit, by God, who, presently after his creation, gave him the following name, to signify what his nature and condition was or would be. Heb. *What is that which hath been* , or *is* , it is, or *hath been named already* . Others understand it thus, All the several conditions which men have had or shall have in the world, riches or poverty, &c., are already named, i.e. appointed or determined by God's unchangeable counsel and invincible providence. But though

this be true, it seems not to suit so well with the following clause as the other interpretation doth.

It is known that it is man; this is certain and manifest, that that being which makes all this noise and stir in the world, howsoever magnified by themselves, and sometimes adored by flatterers, and howsoever differenced from or advanced above others, by wisdom, or riches, or the like, is but a man, i.e. a mean earthly mortal and miserable creature, as his very name signifies, which God gave him for this very end, that he might be always sensible of his vain, and base, and miserable estate in this world, and therefore never expect satisfaction or happiness in it.

With him that is mightier than he, i.e. with Almighty God, with whom men are very apt to contend upon every slight occasion, and against whom they are ready to murmur for this vanity, and mortality, and misery of mankind, although they brought it upon themselves by their own sins. So this is seasonably added to prevent the abuse of the foregoing passage.

Ecclesiastes 6:11

This seems to be added as a conclusion of the disputation managed in all the foregoing chapters,

Seeing not only man is a vain creature in himself, as hath been now said, but *there are also many other things* in the world, *which* instead of removing or diminishing, as might be expected, do but *increase* this *vanity*, as wisdom, pleasure, power, wealth, and the like, the vanity of all which hath been fully and particularly declared. Seeing even the good things of this life bring so much toil, and cares, and fears, &c. with them.

What is man the better, to wit, by all that he can either desire or enjoy here? Hence it is evident that all these things cannot make him happy, but that he must seek for happiness elsewhere.

Ecclesiastes 6:12

Who knoweth what is good for man? no man certainly knows what is best for him here, whether to be high or low, rich or poor, because those great things which men generally desire and pursue are very frequently the occasions of men's utter ruin, as hath been noted again and again in this book.

Vain life; life itself, which is the foundation of all men's comforts and enjoyments here, is a vain, and uncertain, and transitory thing, and therefore all things which depend upon it must needs be so too.

A shadow; which, whilst it abides, hath nothing real, and solid, or substantial in it, and doth speedily pass away, and leaves no sign behind it. And as no man can be happy with these things whilst he liveth and enjoyeth them, so he can have no content in leaving them to others, because he knoweth not either who shall possess them, or how the future owners will use or abuse them, or what mischief they may do by them, either to others, or even to themselves.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 7

A good name desirable; and the house of mourning and rebuke better than songs and laughter, Ecc_7:1-6. Exhortations to patience and perseverance, Ecc_7:7-10. Wisdom and money a defence, Ecc_7:11,**12**. God's providence should render its contented: our duty both in prosperity and adversity, Ecc_7:13,**14**. Prudence and the fear of God necessary in this world, Ecc_7:15-18. The praise of wisdom, Ecc_7:19. All men are sinners, Ecc_7:20. Other men's opinions of thee not too much to be minded: the motive thereto, Ecc_7:21,**22**. The Preacher's experience thereof, Ecc_7:23-25. An evil woman more bitter than death, Ecc_7:26-28. God created man good, Ecc_7:29.

Having largely discoursed of the vanity of all worldly things, and now said in the foregoing verse that no man knew what was best for him, he now proceeds to prescribe some remedies against these vanities, and to direct men to the right method of obtaining that felicity which is not to be expected or found in this world.

A good name; a good and well-grounded report from wise and worthy persons. Heb. *a name* , which is put for a good name by a synecdoche, that only being worthy to be called a name, because evil and worthless men quickly lose their name and memory. Thus *a wife* is put for a good wife, Pro_18:22, and *a day* for *a good day* , Luk_19:42,**44**.

Precious ointment; which was very fragrant, and acceptable, and useful, and of great price, especially in those countries. See Deu_33:24 Psa_92:10 **133:2** Isa_39:2.

The day of death, to wit, of a good man, or one who hath left a good name behind him, which is easily understood both from the former

clause, and from the nature of the thing; for to a wicked man this day is far worse, and most terrible. Yet if this passage be delivered with respect only to this life, and abstracting from the future life, as many other passages in this book are to be understood, then this may be true in general of all men, and is the consequent of all the former discourse. Seeing this life is so full of vanity, and vexation, and misery, it is a more desirable thing for a man to go out of it, than to come into it; which is the more considerable note, because it is contrary to the opinion and practice of almost all mankind, to celebrate their own or children's birth-days with solemn feasts and rejoicings, and their deaths with all expressions of sorrow.

Ecclesiastes 7:2

The house of mourning; where mourners meet together to celebrate the funerals of a deceased friend. *That*, to wit, death, the cause of that mourning,

is the end of all men; it brings men to the serious consideration of their last end, which is their greatest wisdom and interest.

Will lay it to his heart; will be seriously affected with it, and awakened to prepare for it; whereas feasting is commonly attended with mirth, and levity, and manifold temptations, and indisposeth men's minds to spiritual and heavenly thoughts. Hence it is evident that those passages of this book which may seem to favour a sensual and voluptuous life, are not spoken by Solomon in his own name, or as his opinion, but in the person of an epicure.

Ecclesiastes 7:3

Sorrow; either for sin, or any outward troubles.

The sadness of the countenance; which is seated in the heart, but manifested in the countenance.

Made better; more weaned from the lusts and vanities of this world, by which most men are ensnared and destroyed, and more quickened to seek after and embrace that true and everlasting happiness which God offers to them in his word.

Ecclesiastes 7:4

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, even when their bodies are absent. They are constantly, or very frequently, meditating upon sad and serious firings, such as death and judgment, the vanity of

this life, and the reality and eternity of the next, because they know that these thoughts, though they be not grateful to the sensual part, yet they are absolutely necessary, and highly profitable, and most comfortable in the end, which every wise man most regards.

The heart of fools is in the house of mirth; their minds and affections are wholly set upon feasting and jollity, because, like fools and brutish creatures, they regard only their present delight, and mind not how dearly they must pay for them.

Ecclesiastes 7:5

The rebuke of the wise, though it causeth some grief, yet frequently brings great benefit, even reformation and salvation, both from temporal and from eternal destruction, both which are the portion of impenitent sinners.

The song; the flatteries, or other merry discourses, which are as pleasant to corrupt nature, as songs or music.

Ecclesiastes 7:6

The crackling of thorns, which for a time make a great noise and blaze, but presently waste themselves, and go out without any considerable effect upon the meat in the pot.

So; so vanishing and fruitless.

Ecclesiastes 7:7

Oppression; either,

1. Active. When a wise man falls into the practice of this sin of oppressing others, he is besotted by it, and by the vast riches which he by his great wit gets by it. Or rather,

2. Passive. When a wise man is oppressed by foolish and wicked men, it makes him fret and rage, and speak or act like a madman; for the wisest men are most sensible of indignities and injuries, whereas fools are stupid, and do not much lay them to heart.

A gift, a bribe given to a wise man,

destroyeth the heart; deprives him of the use of his understanding, which is oft called the heart, as Exo_23:8 Deu_16:19 Hos_4:8, or makes him mad, as was said in the former clause. So this verse discovers two ways whereby a wise man may be made mad, by suffering oppression from others, or by receiving bribes to oppress

others. And this also is an argument of the vanity of worldly wisdom, that it is so easily corrupted and lost, and so it serves the main design of this book.

Ecclesiastes 7:8

If this verse relates to that next foregoing, it is an argument to keep men's minds from being disordered, either by oppression or bribery, because the end of those practices will show, that he who oppresseth another doth himself most hurt by it, and that he who taketh bribes is no gainer by them. But if this be independent upon the former, as divers other verses here are, it is a general and useful observation, that the good or evil of things is better known by their end than by their beginning; which is true both in evil counsels and courses, which are pleasant at first, but at last bring destruction; and in all noble enterprises, in the studies of learning, and in the practice of virtue and godliness, where the beginnings are difficult and troublesome, but in the progress and conclusion they are most easy and comfortable; and it is not sufficient to begin well, unless we persevere to the end, which crowns all.

The patient in spirit, who quietly waits for the end and issue of things, and is willing to bear hardships and inconveniences in the mean time,

is better than the proud; which he puts instead of *hasty or impatient*, which the opposition might seem to require, partly because pride is the chief cause of impatience, Pro_13:10, and makes men unable to bear any thing either from God or from men whereas humility makes men sensible of their own unworthiness, and that they deserve, at least from God, all the indignities and injuries which they suffer from men by God's permission, and therefore patient under them; and partly to correct the vulgar error of proud men, who think highly of themselves, and trample all others, especially such as are meek and patient, under their feet.

Ecclesiastes 7:9

Be not angry with any man without due consideration, and just and necessary cause; for otherwise anger is sometimes lawful, and sometimes a duty.

Resteth; hath its settled and quiet abode, is their constant companion, ever at hand upon all occasions, whereas wise men resist, and mortify, and banish it.

In the bosom; in the heart, the proper seat of the passions.

Ecclesiastes 7:10

Say not thou, to wit, by way of impatient expostulation and complaint against God, either for permitting such disorders in the world, or for bringing thee into the world in such an evil time and state of things. Otherwise a man may say this by way of prudent and pious inquiry, that by searching out the cause he may, as far as it is in his power, apply remedies to make them better.

Better; either,

1. Less sinful. Or rather,

2. More quiet and comfortable. For this, and not the former, is the cause of most men's murmurings against God's providence. And this is an argument of a mind discontented and unthankful for the many mercies which men commonly enjoy even in evil times, and impatient under God's hand.

Thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this; this question showeth thy great folly in contending with thy Creator, and the sovereign Lord and Governor of all things, in opposing thy shallow wit to his unsearchable wisdom, and thy will to his will.

Ecclesiastes 7:11

Good, i.e. very good; the positive being put for the superlative, as it is frequently in the Hebrew text. When wisdom and riches meet in one man, it is a happy conjunction; for wisdom without riches is commonly contemned, Ecc_9:16, and wants opportunities and instruments of discovering itself, and of doing that good in the world which it is both able and willing to do; and riches without wisdom are like a sword in a madman's hand, an occasion of much sin and mischief, both to himself and others.

By it there is profit; by wisdom joined with riches there comes great benefit; Heb. *and it is an excellency* , or *privilege* , or *advantage* .

To them that see the sun, i.e. to mortal men; not only to a man's self, but many others who live with him in this world; whereby he intimates that riches bear no price and have no use in the other world.

Ecclesiastes 7:12

Is a defence, Heb. *is a shadow* ; which in Scripture use notes both protection and refreshment. And thus far wisdom and money agree. But herein knowledge or wisdom (which commonly signifies the same thing) excels riches, that whereas riches frequently expose men to death or destruction, true wisdom doth oftentimes preserve a man from temporal, and always from eternal ruin.

Ecclesiastes 7:13

The work of God; not of creation, but of providence; his wise, and just, and powerful government of all events in the world, which is proposed as the last and best remedy against all murmurings and sinful disquietments of mind, under the sense of the great and many disorders which happen in the world, as is implied, Ecc_7:10, against which wisdom is prescribed as one remedy, Ecc_7:11,12, and now here is another.

Who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? no man can withstand, or correct, or alter any of God's works; and therefore all self-tormenting frettings and discontents at the injuries of men, or calamities of times, are not only sinful, but also vain and fruitless. This reason implies that there is a hand or work of God in all men's actions, either effecting them if they be good, or permitting them if they be bad, and ordering and overruling them, whether they be good or bad. And God is here said to make things crooked, as he is said *to make the hearts of sinners fat or hard* , Isa_6:10, and elsewhere, not positively, but privatively, because he denies or withdraws from men that wisdom or grace which should make them straight.

Ecclesiastes 7:14

Be joyful; enjoy God's favours with cheerfulness and thankfulness.

Consider, to wit, God's work, which is easily understood out of the foregoing verse. Consider that it is God's hand, and therefore submit to it; humble thyself under his hand, be sensible of it, and duly affected with it; consider also why God sends it, for what sins, and with what design. This is a proper season for serious consideration, whereas prosperity relaxeth the mind, and calls it forth to outward things. But this clause may be, and is by some, rendered thus, *and look for a day of adversity* . In prosperity rejoice with trembling, and so as to expect a change.

God also hath set the one over against the other; God hath wisely ordained these vicissitudes that prosperity and adversity should succeed one another in the course of men's lives. *After him* ; either,

1. After man himself, or, as it may be rendered, *after it* , i.e. after his present condition, whether it be prosperous or afflictive. So the sense is, that no man might be able to foresee or find out what shall certainly befall him afterwards, and therefore might live in a constant dependence upon God, and might neither despair in trouble, nor be secure or presumptuous in prosperity, because of the frequent and sudden changes from one to the other. Or,

2. After God, that no man might come after God, and review his works, and find any fault in them, or pretend that he could have managed things better, because this mixture of prosperity and adversity is most convenient both for the glory of God's wisdom, and justice, and goodness and for the benefit of mankind, who have all absolute need of this vicissitude, lest they should be either corrupted and ruined by perpetual prosperity, as many have been, or overwhelmed with uninterrupted adversity.

Ecclesiastes 7:15

All things; all sorts of events, both such as have been already mentioned, and such as I am about to declare. In the days my vanity; since I have come into this vain and transitory life.

In his righteousness; either,

1. Notwithstanding his righteousness; whom his righteousness doth not deliver in common calamities, Eze_21:3,4 33:12. Or,

2. For his righteousness, which exposeth him to the envy, and hatred, and rage of persecutors or wicked men. *In* is sometimes used for *for* ; but it is not so taken in the next clause, which answers to this, and therefore the former seems to be the truer interpretation. *In his wickedness* ; notwithstanding all his wickedness, whereby he provokes and deserves the justice both of God and men, who yet, for many wise and just reasons, is permitted to live long unpunished and secure.

Ecclesiastes 7:16

This verse and the next have a manifest reference to Ecc_7:15, being two inferences drawn from the two clauses of the observation there recorded. And this verse was delivered by Solomon, either,

1. In the name and person of an ungodly man, who taketh occasion to dissuade men from the practice of righteousness and true wisdom, because of the danger which attends it, and is expressed in the middle of the former, and the end of this verse. Therefore, saith he, it is not good to be more nice than wise, take heed of strictness, zeal, and forwardness in religion. And then the next verse contains an antidote to this poisonous suggestion; yea, rather, saith he, be not wicked or foolish over-much; for that will not preserve thee, as thou mayst imagine from the last clause of Ecc_7:15, but will occasion and hasten thy ruin. But seeing these words are very capable of another sense, and there is no proof or evidence of this sense in them, as there is in all other places where Solomon speaks in the person of an epicure, this interpretation may seem to be dangerous, and liable to misconstruction. Or,

2. In his own person. And so these words are a caution to prevent, as far as may be, that destruction which oft attends upon righteous men, as was observed, Ecc_7:15.

Be not righteous over-much; either,

1. By being too severe in observing, censuring, and punishing the faults of others beyond the rules of equity, without giving any allowance for human infirmity, extraordinary temptations, the state of times, and other circumstances. Or,

2. By being more just than God requires, either laying those yokes and burdens upon a man's self or others which God hath not imposed upon him, and which are too heavy for him, of which see on Mat_23:4, or condemning or avoiding those things as sinful which God hath not forbidden, which really is superstition, but is here called righteousness abusively, because it is so in appearance, and in the opinion of such persons. So he gives them the name, but by adding

over-much, denies the thing, because righteousness, as well as other virtues, avoids both the extremes, the excess as well as the deficit. Or,

3. By an imprudent and unseasonable ostentation or exercise of righteousness where it is not necessary, as if a protestant travelling in a popish country should publicly profess his religion to all whom he meets with, or when a man casts the pearl of reproof before swine, against that caution, Mat_7:6. So this is a precept that men should

manage their zeal with godly wisdom, and with condescension to others, as far as may be. But this is not to be understood, either,

1. Of such prudence as keeps a man from the practice of his duty, but only of that prudence which directs him in ordering the time, manner, and other circumstances of it. Or,

2. As if men could be too good, or too holy, since the strictest holiness which any man in this life can arrive at falls far short both of the rule of God's word, and of those examples of God and Christ, and the holy angels, which are propounded in Scripture for our imitation.

Neither make thyself over-wise; be not wise in thine own conceit, nor above what is written, 1Co_4:6, nor above what is meet; which he here implieth to be the cause of being righteous over-much.

Why shouldest thou destroy thyself? for thereby thou wilt unnecessarily expose thyself to danger and mischief.

Ecclesiastes 7:17

Be not over-much wicked; do not take occasion, either from the impunity of sinners, Ecc_7:15, or from the prohibition of excessive righteousness, to run into the contrary extreme, the defect of righteousness, or to give up thyself to the practice of all manner of wickedness, as the manner of many men is, Ecc_8:11. But this is not to be understood as if he allowed a lower degree of wickedness, no more than that prohibition of *not letting the sun go down upon a man 's wrath* , Eph_4:26, permits him to keep his wrath all the day long; and no more than the condemnation of *excess of riot* , and of *abominable idolatries* , 1Pe_4:3,4, doth justify any kind of rioting or idolatry.

Neither be thou foolish; which he adds to show that such sinners, howsoever they esteem themselves wise, yet in truth are egregious fools, as the following words prove.

Die before thy time; either by the justice of the magistrate, or by the vengeance of God. For though I said that sometimes a wicked man prolongeth his days, &c., Ecc_7:15, yet commonly such persons are cut off, and thou hast sufficient reason to expect and fear it.

Ecclesiastes 7:18

Take hold of, embrace and practise, *this* ; this counsel last given, Ecc_7:17.

Also from this; from that foregoing advice, Ecc_7:16. It is good to avoid both those extremes.

Withdraw not thine hand from the practice of it.

He that feareth God, who ordereth his actions so as to please God, and keep his commands, and walk by the rule of his word, shall come forth of them all; shall be delivered from both these, and from all other extremes, and from all the evil consequences of them. The word *all* is sometimes put for both, as being used of two only, as Ecc_2:14.

Ecclesiastes 7:19

Wisdom; true wisdom, which is always joined with the fear of God, and which teacheth a man to keep close to the rule of his duty, without turning either to the right hand or to the left.

Strengtheneth the wise; supporteth him in and secureth him against troubles and dangers.

Ten, i.e. many, uniting the forces together.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

For; so this is a reason either,

1. Of the foregoing counsels, Ecc_7:10-18, the 19th verse being interposed only as a proof of the last clause of Ecc_7:18. Or,

2. To show the necessity and advantage of that wisdom commended Ecc_7:19, because all men are very prone to folly and sin, and therefore need that wisdom which is from above to direct and keep them from it. But this particle may be, and elsewhere is, commonly rendered yet; and so the sense is, Although wisdom doth exceedingly strengthen a man, yet it doth not so strengthen him, as if it would keep him from falling into all sin. Or, *because* ; or, *seeing that* ; and so this relates to the following verse, Seeing all men sin, we should be ready to pardon the offences of others against us, either by word or deed. Or, *surely* ; and so it is an entire sentence, such as there are many in this book.

There is not a just man upon earth, whereby he manifestly implies that the just in heaven are perfect and sinless, that doeth good, and sinneth not; who is universally and perfectly good, and free from all sin.

Ecclesiastes 7:21

Take no heed; do not severely observe nor strictly search into them, nor listen to hear them, as many persons out of curiosity use to do.

Unto all words that are spoken, to wit, concerning thee, or against thee. Under this one kind of offences of the tongue, which are most frequent, he seems to understand all injuries which we suffer from others, and adviseth us that we do not too rigidly examine them, nor too deeply resent them, but rather neglect and forget them.

Lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; which will vex and grieve thee, and may provoke thee to vengeance and cruelty against him.

Ecclesiastes 7:22

Heart; mind or conscience, as that word is frequently used.

Hast cursed others; either upon some great provocation and sudden passion, or possibly upon a mere mistake, or false report; in which case thou hast both needed and desired the forbearance and forgiveness of others, and therefore by the rules of justice, as well as of piety and clarity, thou art obliged to deal likewise with others.

Ecclesiastes 7:23

All this, or *all these things* , of which I have here discoursed,

have I proved, I have diligently examined and found all this to be true, by wisdom; by the help of that singular wisdom which God had given me.

I said, I will be wise; I determined within myself that I would by all possible means seek to attain perfection of wisdom, and I persuaded myself that I should attain to it.

But it was far from me; I found myself greatly disappointed, and the more I knew, the more I saw mine own folly and misery.

Ecclesiastes 7:24

No human wit can attain to perfect wisdom, or to the exact knowledge of God's counsels and-works, and the reasons of them, because they are unsearchably deep, and far above our sight; some of them being long since past, and therefore, utterly unknown to us, and others yet to come, which we cannot foreknow.

Ecclesiastes 7:25

I applied mine heart; I was not discouraged, but provoked by the difficulty of the work to undertake it; which is an argument of a great and generous soul.

To know, and to search, and to seek out; he useth three words signifying the same thing, to intimate his vehement desire and vigorous and unwearied endeavour after it.

The reason of things, both of God's various providences, and of the differing and contrary counsels and courses of men.

To know the wickedness of folly, that I might clearly and fully understand the great evil of sin, and all that wickedness and folly or madness which is bound up in the hearts of all men by nature, and which discovers itself in the course of their lives.

Ecclesiastes 7:26

I find, by my own sad experience; which Solomon here records, partly as an instance of that folly and madness which he expressed in general, Ecc_7:25, and partly as a testimony of his true repentance for his foul miscarriages, for which he was willing to take shame to himself, not only from the present, but from all succeeding generations.

More bitter; more vexatious and pernicious, as producing those horrors of conscience, those reproaches, and diseases, and other plagues, both temporal and spiritual, from God, which are far worse than simple death and, after all these, everlasting destruction.

The woman, the strange woman, of whom he speaks so much in the Proverbs,

whose heart is snares and nets; who being subtle of heart, Pro_7:10, is full of crafty devices to ensnare men; and her hands, either by gifts, or rather by lascivious actions, as bands; wherewith she holds them fast in cruel bondage; so that they have neither power nor will to forsake her, notwithstanding all the dangers and mischiefs which they know do attend upon such practices.

Whoso pleaseth God, Heb. *he that is good before God* ; either,

1. Whom God loves and favours. Or rather,
2. Who is good sincerely, or in the judgment of God, who cannot be deceived, whereas hypocrites are frequently good in the eyes or

opinions of men; which sense seems to be confirmed from the opposition of

the sinner to him, both here and Ecc_2:26. Hereby he intimates that neither a good temper of mind, nor great discretion, nor good education and instruction, nor any other thing, except God's grace, is a sufficient preservative from the dominion of this lust.

Shall escape from her; shall be prevented from falling into that sin; or if by surprisal or strong temptation he be drawn to it, he shall be recovered out of it by true repentance. *The sinner* ; the wilful and obstinate sinner, who gives himself up to the common practice of this or other sins; he who is a sinner before the Lord, as the Sodomites are called, Gen_13:13, who is fitly opposed to him that is good before God; he in whom there is not a dram of true goodness; for otherwise all men are sinners, as was said, Ecc_7:20.

Shall be taken by her; shall be entangled and kept fast in her chains, as is implied, because this is opposed to *escaping from her* .

Ecclesiastes 7:27

Behold; it is a strange thing, and worthy of your serious observation.

The preacher; or, *the penitent* , who speaks what he hath learned, both by deep, study and costly experience.

Counting one by one; considering things or persons very exactly and distinctly, one after another; and not only in general and confusedly, in which case a man may very easily be mistaken; and comparing them together, whereby I was enabled to make the truer judgment of them.

To find out the account, that I might make a true and just estimate in this matter. Or, as it is in the margin:, and was rendered Ecc_7:25, *the reason* , to wit, of that which I am about to say. I considered the persons severally and critically, that from thence I might understand the reason of the thing.

Ecclesiastes 7:28

My soul seeketh; it seemed so wonderful to me, that I suspected I had not made a sufficient inquiry, and therefore I returned to search again with more earnestness and accurateness.

I find not; that it was so he found out, as he now said, Ecc_7:27 but the whole truth and reason of the thing he could not find out.

One man; one worthy of the name of a man; a wise and virtuous man. Man is put for a worthy or good man, as *name* is put for *a good name* , above, Ecc_7:1, and *wife* for *a good wife* , as was noted before.

Among a thousand, with whom I have conversed. He is supposed to mention this number in allusion to his thousand wives and concubines, as they are numbered by parcels, 1Ki_11:3.

A woman; one worthy of that name; one who is not a dishonour to her kind and sex, who is not brutish in her disposition and conversation.

Among all those in that thousand whom I have taken into intimate society with myself; whereby he also passeth a severe censure upon himself that he had associated himself with such persons, and not with the virtuous women, which doubtless there were in his time, as appears from **Pr 31**. It is not Solomon's design to disparage this sex, nor to make a general comparison between men and women in all places and ages, but only to suggest his own experience concerning it.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

This only have I found; though I could not find out all the streams of wickedness, and their infinite windings and turnings in the world, yet I have discovered the fountain of it, to wit, original sin, and the corruption of nature, which is both in men and women.

God hath made man, God made our first parents, Adam and Eve, *upright* , Heb. *right* , without any imperfection or corruption, conformable to his nature and will, which is the rule of right, after his own likeness, understanding, and holy, and every way good.

They, our first parents, and after them their posterity treading in their steps,

have sought out many inventions; were not contented with their present state, but aimed at higher things, and studied new ways of making themselves more wise and happy than God had made them, and readily hearkened to the suggestions of the devil to that end. And we their sinful and wretched children, after their example, are still prone to forsake the certain rule of God's word, and the true way to happiness, and to seek new methods and inventions of attaining to it, even such as Solomon hath discoursed of in this book.

Ecclesiastes 8:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 8

Kings to be greatly respected, Ecc_8:1-5. Our times uncertain; death not to be resisted, Ecc_8:6-8. An evil magistrate buried and forgot, Ecc_8:9,**10**. Men hardened in sin, because not presently punished; but they shall not escape, but it shall go ill with them, Ecc_8:11-13; as it doth also sometimes with the righteous, whilst the wicked prosper, Ecc_8:14. Mirth therefore, and a contented enjoyment of God's gifts, preferable to immoderate care and search, Ecc_8:15. God's work herein past finding out, Ecc_8:16,**17**.

Who is as the wise man? who is to be compared with a wise man? He is incomparably the most excellent man in the world. Or rather, who is truly wise? the particle *as* being here not a note of similitude, but of reality, as it is Joh_1:14, and in many other places, as hath been noted. There are very few or no truly wise men in this world. This seems best to agree with the next clause, which is not, *who is as he that knoweth* , but *who knoweth* , &c.

Who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? how few are there who understand the reasons of things, and can rightly expound the word and works of God, and instruct and satisfy himself and others in all the doubtful and difficult cases of human actions!

A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine; maketh a man illustrious and venerable, cheerful, and mild, and amiable in his carriage to others. *The face* is put for the mind or inward frame, because the mind discovers itself in the countenance.

The boldness of his face; the roughness or fierceness, the pride or impudence of his disposition, as this phrase is used, Deu_28:50 Pro_7:13 **21:29** Dan_8:23; shall be changed into gentleness and humility.

Ecclesiastes 8:2

I counsel thee; which verb is necessarily understood to make the sense full and complete. See the like defects of speech, Psa_120:7 Isa_5:9, &c.

To keep the king's commandment; observe and obey all his commands; which is not to be understood universally, as if the king should have commanded them to deny or blaspheme God, or to worship idols, in which case every Christian man who reads and

believes the Bible must needs confess that the Israelites especially were obliged to obey God rather than man, but only of such commands as are not contrary to the will of God.

In regard of the oath of God; either,

1. Because of that oath which thou hast taken to keep all God's laws, whereof this of obedience to superiors is one; or,

2. Because of that covenant or oath of fealty and allegiance whereby thou hast engaged thyself to him, of which see 1Ch₁₁:3 **29:24** Eze₁₇:16,**18**. Though this may also be understood, and is by some learned interpreters taken, as a limitation of their obedience to kings, the words being thus rendered, as the Hebrew will very well bear, *but according to the word of the oath of God* ; obey the king's commands, with this caution, that they be agreeable and not contrary to the laws of God, which thou art obliged by thy own and by thy parents' oaths oft renewed to observe in the first place.

Ecclesiastes 8:3

To go out of his sight, Heb. *to go from his face or presence* , to wit, in dislike, or in discontent, withdrawing thyself from thy king's service or obedience, as malcontents use to do; for this will both provoke him, and lead thee by degrees into sedition or rebellion.

Stand not in an evil thing; if thou hast offended him, persist not in it, but humbly acknowledge thine offence, and beg his pardon and favour.

He doeth whatsoever pleaseth him; his power is uncontrollable in his dominions, and therefore thou canst neither resist nor avoid his fury.

Ecclesiastes 8:4

There is power; whatsoever he commandeth he wants not power nor instruments to execute it, and therefore can easily punish thee as he pleaseth.

Who may say? Heb. *who shall say* ? Who will presume or dare to say so? He doth not affirm that it is unlawful to say so, for Samuel said so to Saul, **1Sa 15**, and Nathan to David, **2Sa 12**, and several other prophets to the kings of Judah and Israel, but only that it is difficult and dangerous.

Ecclesiastes 8:5

The commandment; either,

1. Of the king, of which he hath hitherto spoken. Or,

2. Of God; for *the word* , or commandments, or *law* are oft used emphatically for the word, *law* , or *command of God* , as hath been formerly and frequently observed, and the commandment is put for the commandments, as is very usual. And so Solomon passeth from his former to a new subject.

Shall feel no evil thing; shall be delivered from those mischiefs which befall the disobedient.

Both time and judgment; both when, and how far, and in what manner he may or must keep the commands of the king or God. For the word here rendered judgment doth signify *right* , as Deu_21:17, as also *a cause* or *controversy* , as Num_27:5, and the manner or rule of actions, as Jud_13:12. The sense is, A wise man knows both what he ought to do, and what are the fittest seasons for doing it, which he seeketh and embraceth.

Ecclesiastes 8:6

There is time and judgment; there is a fit way and season for the happy accomplishment of every business which a man designeth or undertaketh to do, which is known to God, but for the most part hidden from man, as is implied and may be gathered from the following words. **See Poole "Ecc_3:1"**.

Therefore; because there are very few who have that wisdom which is necessary to discern this, as was now said, Ecc_9:5, and most men do by their ignorance and loss of opportunities deprive themselves of many advantages, and expose themselves to manifold miseries.

Ecclesiastes 8:7

Men are generally ignorant of all future events, and of the success of their endeavours, and therefore their minds are greatly disquieted, and their expectations frequently disappointed, and they fall into many mistakes and miscarriages, which they could and would prevent if they did foresee the issues of things.

Who can tell him? no wise man, no astrologer or other artist, can discover this.

Ecclesiastes 8:8

The spirit, i.e. the soul of man, which is oft called a spirit, as Job_7:7 **10:12** Psa_78:39 **104:29**, &c.

To retain the spirit; to keep it in the body beyond the time which God hath allotted to it. This is added as another evidence of man's misery.

In the day; or, against the day, i.e. to avoid or delay that day.

There is no discharge, as there is in other wars, when soldiers either are dismissed from the service, or escape by flight or otherwise. *In that war* ; in that fatal conflict between life and death, between nature and the disease, when a man is struggling with death, though to no purpose, for death shall always be conqueror.

Neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it; and although wicked men, who most fear death, use all possible means, whether good or bad, to free themselves from this deadly blow, yet they shall not escape it.

Ecclesiastes 8:9

All this; all these things before mentioned.

Applied my heart unto every work; I have been a diligent observer of all actions and events.

There is a time wherein one man ruleth over another; there are some kings who use their power tyrannically and wickedly, whereby they do not only oppress their people, but hurt themselves, by bringing the vengeance of God and men upon their own heads; which is here noted, partly for the terror of tyrants, and partly for the caution and comfort of subjects groaning under those heavy pressures which they are not able to remove, that they may forbear unlawful or rebellious courses, and quietly commit themselves and their cause to God, who judgeth righteously, and who both can and will call the greatest monarchs to a sad account for all their impious and unrighteous courses.

Ecclesiastes 8:10

And so, in like manner, or such another vanity or disorder, I saw the wicked; wicked princes or rulers, as the next clause limits this.

Buried; die quietly in their beds, and afterward be buried with state and pomp, whereas in truth they deserved an untimely end, and no other than the burial of an ass.

Who had come and gone; who had administered public justice and government, which is frequently signified by the phrase of coming in

and *going out before the people* , as Num_27:17 Deu_31:2. The seventy Jewish interpreters, whom some others follow, render the word, *they were praised* , applauded and adored, by the variation of one letter in the Hebrew word, which also is very like that letter which is in the text.

The place of the holy; by which he understands either,

1. The holy city Jerusalem, or the Holy Land, where Israel dwelt; which may be added to aggravate the wickedness of such persons, from the obligations, and counsels, and examples which they had to do better things. Or,

2. The seat of majesty and judgment, which may well be called the place or seat of the Holy, i.e. of God, who is called the Holy One, Hab_3:3, and oft elsewhere, who is in a special manner present in and president over those places, whose work, and for whom, and in whose name and stead, magistrates act, who therefore are called gods; of all which see Exo_22:28 Deu_1:17 1Ch_29:23 Psa_82:1, &c. And the throne or tribunal seems to be so called here, to aggravate their wickedness, who being sacred persons, and advanced by God into so high and sacred a place, betrayed so great a trust, and both practised and encouraged that wickedness which by their office they were obliged to suppress and punish. *They were forgotten* ; whereas they designed to spread and perpetuate their names and memories to succeeding ages, Psa_49:11. *Where they had so done* , i.e. come to and go from the place of the holy; where they lived in great splendour, and were buried with great magnificence; which might have kept up their remembrance at least in that place. *This is also vanity* ; that men should so earnestly thirst after and please themselves with worldly greatness and glory, which is so soon extinct, and the very memory of it quickly worn out of the minds of men.

Ecclesiastes 8:11

Sentence against an evil work; or, the decree, &c. God's determinate counsel or sentence for the punishment of tyrants and all evil-doers.

Therefore; because God's forbearance makes them presumptuous and secure, and confident of impunity.

Is fully set, Heb. *is filled* , is carried on with full sail, as the LXX. understand it, like a ship with a strong and violent wind; or, is bold or presumptuous, as the same phrase is understood, Est_7:5 Act_5:3.

Ecclesiastes 8:12

An hundred times; frequently and innumerably.

His days; the time of his life and prosperity.

It shall be well with them that fear God; whereby he implies, both that good men might for a time suffer grievous things from such wicked tyrants, and that it should be very ill with the wicked, which is manifest from the contrary course and condition of good and bad men, and which is expressed in the following words: compare Psa_2:12. *Before him* ; or, at *his presence* ; who stand in awe of God, and forbear and fear to sin out of a sincere respect and reverence to God.

Ecclesiastes 8:13

It shall not be well, i.e. it shall go very ill with him; great miseries are prepared for him; which is a figure oft used in Scripture, as hath been formerly and frequently observed.

Neither shall he prolong his days, to wit, very long, or for ever, as he desireth.

As a shadow; his life, though it may be or seem to be long, yet in truth is but a mere shadow, which will quickly vanish and disappear, and be as if it never had been; and many times, like a shadow, when it is longest, it is nearest to abolition.

Because he feareth not before God; this is the punishment of his wickedness, and his casting off the fear and service of God. For although the lives of good men upon earth are short, as well as the lives of the wicked, yet their days are not like a shadow, because they are prolonged far beyond this mortal state, even to all eternity, and death itself doth but open the way for them to an endless life.

Ecclesiastes 8:14

Which is done; either by wicked potentates, who do commonly advance unworthy men, and oppress persons of greatest virtue and merit; or by God's providence, who sees it fit for many weighty reasons so to manage the affairs of the present world.

Unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked, i.e. the merit of their work; the work being oft put for the recompence given or belonging to it, as Lev_19:13 Job_7:2 Psa_109:20. The sense is, who meets with such hard usage as the worst of men deserve.

To whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous; who, instead of those just and dreadful punishments which they deserve by the laws of God and men, receive those encouragements and rewards which are due to virtuous and worthy men.

This also is vanity; this is a very unreasonable and foolish thing, if it be considered without respect unto another life, as it is here, where Solomon is discoursing of the vanity of the present life, and of the impossibility of finding satisfaction and happiness in it.

Ecclesiastes 8:15

This he speaks, either,

1. In the person of a sensual man. Things being so, as was related, Ecc_8:14, it is best to give a man's self up to eating and drinking, and all manner of carnal delights. Or,

2. In his own name and person. Upon these considerations I concluded that it was most advisable for a man not to perplex and torment himself with the thoughts of the seeming inequality of Divine Providence, and of the great disorders which are in the world, or with cares and fears about future events, or with infinite and insatiable desires of worldly things; but quietly, and cheerfully, and thankfully to enjoy the comforts which God gives him. **See Poole "Ecc_2:24 3:12,13.**

That shall abide with him of his labour; this is the best advantage which he can make of this world's goods as to the present life.

Ecclesiastes 8:16

I applied mine heart to know wisdom: this he seems to add as the reason of that judgment which he had now passed, Ecc_8:15, because he had diligently studied wherein man's wisdom did consist, and had observed the restlessness of men's minds and bodies in other courses.

To see the business; either,

1. To find out the work of God, as the next verse may seem to explain it, and all the mysteries of God's providence in the government of this present and lower world. Or,

2. To observe men's various designs and employments, and their toilsome and unwearied businesses or labours about worldly things; which sense seems best to agree, both with the use of this Hebrew word, which is constantly used in this sense in all the places of

Scripture where it is, which are Ecc_1:13 **2:23,26 3:10 4:8 5:3,14 8:16**, and never concerning the works of God; and with the foregoing and following words, as we shall see. *There is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes* : the sense of the words thus translated and pointed seems to be this, There is a certain man, whom it is needless to name, (which is a modest designation of himself, like that of St. Paul, 2Co_12:2, *I knew a man in Christ* , &c.,) who studied those matters day and night, and therefore is very capable of passing a judgment about them. But, with submission, there seems to be no need of a parenthesis to cut off these words from the former, with whom they have a fit connexion. For having now mentioned the *business which is done* , or which man doeth, upon earth, he further adds, as an evidence of man's eagerness in pursuing his business, *for even by day and by night he* (to wit, the busy man, which is easily understood from the foregoing clause) *seeth not sleep with his eyes* , i.e. he grudgeth himself even necessary refreshments, and disquiets himself with endless cares and labours, the fruit whereof he doth but little enjoy; and therefore it is better *to eat and drink* , &c., as I now said, Ecc_8:15. As for the phrase of *seeing sleep* , it is a figurative expression used in other authors, and is like that of seeing death, Psa_89:48.

Ecclesiastes 8:17

Then, Heb. *and* , or *moreover* , I beheld all the work of God; I considered the counsels and ways of God, and the various methods of his providence towards good and bad men, and the reasons of them.

A man cannot find out; no man, though never so wise, and inquisitive, and studious, as it follows, is able fully and perfectly to understand these things; and therefore it is best for man not to perplex himself with endless and fruitless inquiries about these matters, but quietly to submit to God's will and providence, and to live in the fear of God, and the comfortable enjoyment of his blessings.

Ecclesiastes 9:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 9

All things in the hand of God: his love or hatred not visible in them; but the like happeneth to good and bad in this life, and in death they know nothing hereof, and are themselves forgotten, Ecc_9:1-6. It is best therefore for a man to enjoy the gifts of God with cheerfulness, Ecc_9:7-9; to be diligent in his calling, Ecc_9:10, and leave the issue to God, Ecc_9:11,12. The praise of wisdom, Ecc_9:13-18.

For; or, *therefore* , as the seventy interpreters render it.

All this; all that I have said concerning the methods of Divine Providence towards good and bad men.

To declare all this; to make this evident, first to myself, and then to others, as occasion required.

The righteous and the wise; whom he mentions not exclusively, as if wicked men were not in God's hand, for the next clause relates both to good and bad men; but eminently, because by the course of God's providence towards them they might seem to be quite neglected and forsaken by God.

Their works; either efficiently, all their actions and employments; or objectively, all things done to them, all events which befall them.

Are in the hand of God; are subject to his power, and governed by his providence, as this phrase is used Pro_21:1 Joh_3:35, compared with Mat_28:18. And therefore although we cannot fully understand the reasons of all God's works, as he now said, Ecc_8:17, yet because they are done by his unerring hand, we may be assured that they are done both righteously and justly, and that no man hath cause to murmur at the prosperity of the wicked, or at the calamities of good men.

No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them; no man can judge by their present and outward conditions or dispensations of God's providence whether God loves or hates them, for whom he loves he chastens, and permitteth those whom he hates to prosper in the world. And this translation and interpretation agreeth well with the following verse. But I must confess it differs from almost all other, both ancient and modern, translations. And these words with the foregoing clause are translated otherwise, and that word for word according to the Hebrew, *the righteous, and the wise , and their works, are in the hand of God; also love and hatred* (understand out of the foregoing clause, *are in God 's hand* . And this may be meant either,

1. Of God's love and hatred, which he disposeth when, and to whom, and in what manner he pleaseth. Or,

2. Of, men's love and hatred, *also their love and their hatred* , the pronoun *their* being repeated out of the former clause, as is frequent in Scripture. And so the sense is, that not only men's works, as he now said, but even their inward passions or affections, which seem to be

most in their own power, are as much in God's disposal as their outward actions. Then follows the last clause in the same order in which the words lie in the Hebrew text): *no man knoweth all* , or *any thing* , which is before him. Which I thus understand, whereas all men, and all their affections, and actions, and the events of them, are perfectly known to God, and disposed by him, men know nothing, no, not such things as are most plain, and easy, and familiar to them, and can neither foresee the plainest things, nor dispose of the smallest things as they please; but all things are wholly ordered and overruled by God's providence, not as men imagine or desire, but as he sees fit.

Ecclesiastes 9:2

All things come alike to all; the good and evil things of this world do equally happen to good and bad men.

The clean; either,

1. Morally clean or holy men. Or,
2. Legally, who made conscience of keeping himself pure from all legal defilements, according to the law then in force, and consequently from all other sins upon the same ground.

That sacrificeth; that worshippeth God sincerely, though it be to his cost. *As is the good* , so is the sinner, as to all outward things.

That sweareth, to wit, customarily, unnecessarily, rashly, without due consideration and reverence, or falsely and wickedly. For otherwise that some swearing was then allowed, and in some cases required, none do or can deny.

That feareth an oath; who is afraid of offending God, or abusing his name, by vain, or rash, or false oaths.

Ecclesiastes 9:3

An evil; a great trouble and temptation to a considerate and good man.

The heart of the sons of men, of wicked men, such as the generality of mankind are,

is full of evil; either,

1. Of grief upon this occasion. Or rather,
2. Of wickedness, as appears from the next clause, and by comparing this place with Ecc_8:11.

Madness is in their heart; upon this account they go on madly and desperately in evil courses, without any fear of an after-reckoning.

After that they go to the dead; after all their mad and wicked pranks in the whole course of their life, they die in the same manner as the best men do. So hitherto there is no difference. For Solomon here forbears the consideration of the future life. Only he seems to intimate, that as the madness, so the happiness of the wicked is ended by death, which is more fully expressed in the following words.

Ecclesiastes 9:4

That is joined to all the living; that continueth in the land and society of living men. Or, according to the reading of the Hebrew text,

that is chosen or allotted to life, whom God hath appointed yet to live in the world, when he hath appointed that many others shall die; or who are *written among the living*, as the phrase is, Isa_4:3, which is borrowed from the custom of cities, where men are first chosen, and then enrolled citizens.

There is hope; he hath not only some comfort for the present, but also hopes of further and greater happiness in this world, which men are very prone to entertain and cherish in themselves. Yea, they may have the hopes of a better life, if they improve their opportunities. But he seems to confine himself here to the present life.

Better, i.e. much happier, as to the comforts and privileges of this world, though in other respects death be better than life, as was said, Ecc_7:1.

Ecclesiastes 9:5

The living know that they shall die; whereby they are taught to improve life, whilst they have it, to their greatest comfort and advantage.

The dead know not anything, to wit, of the actions and events in this world, as this is limited in the end of the next verse. Compare Job_14:21 Isa_13:16.

A reward; the reward or fruit of their labours in this world, which is utterly lost as to them, and enjoyed by others. See Ecc_2:21. For otherwise, that there are future rewards after death, is asserted by Solomon elsewhere, as we have seen, and shall hereafter see.

Is forgotten, to wit, amongst living men, and even in those places where they had lived in great power and glory; as was noted, Ecc_8:10.

Ecclesiastes 9:6

They neither love, nor hate, nor envy any person or thing in this world, but are now altogether unconcerned in all things done under the sun.

In any thing that is done under the sun; in any worldly thing; by which limitation he sufficiently insinuates his belief of their portion in the other world.

Ecclesiastes 9:7

Go thy way, make this use of what I have said,

eat thy bread; thine own, the fruit of thy own labours, not what thou takest unjustly from others. *Bread* ; necessary and convenient food; by which he excludes excess.

With a merry heart; cheerfully and thankfully enjoy thy comforts, avoiding all distracting care and grief for the occurrences of this world.

God now accepteth thy works; is gracious to thee, hath blessed thy labours with success, and alloweth thee a comfortable enjoyment of his blessings.

Ecclesiastes 9:8

Always; in all convenient times and circumstances; for there are times of mourning, Ecc_3:4 **7:2**: compare Pro_5:19.

White; decent, and splendid, as far as is suitable to the condition. The Eastern people of the best sort used white garments, especially in times of rejoicing, as Est_8:15: compare Rev_3:4,**5 6:11**. But by this whiteness of garments, he understands a pleasant and cheerful conversation.

Let thy head lack no ointment; which upon joyful occasions was poured upon men's heads, Amo_6:6 Luk_7:46 Joh_12:3.

Ecclesiastes 9:9

Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest; so he limits him to lawful delights; whereby it is evident that Solomon doth not speak this in the person of an epicure, as some understand it.

Of the life of thy vanity; of this vain and frail life; which expression he industriously useth to moderate men's affections even towards

lawful pleasures, and to mind them of their duty and interest in making sure of a better life, and more solid comforts.

Thy portion, allowed to thee by God, and the best part of worldly enjoyments, in this life; by which addition he is again admonishing him of seeking another portion in the future life.

Ecclesiastes 9:10

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, what thou hast opportunity and ability to do in the duties of thy calling, and in order to thy comfort and benefit,

do it with thy might; with unwearied diligence, and vigour, and expedition; whereby he again discovers that he doth not persuade men to an idle and sensual life, but only to a sober enjoyment of his comforts in God's fear, and with an industrious prosecution of his vocation.

There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave; thou canst neither design nor act any thing there tending to thy own comfort or advantage; therefore slip not thine only season.

Ecclesiastes 9:11

I returned, and saw: this may have some respect to the foregoing verse; for having pressed men to labour with all their might, he now adds, by way of caution, that yet they must not be confident of their own strength, as if they were sure of success by it, but in all, above all, to look up to God for his blessing, without which all their endeavours will be in vain. But it seems chiefly to be added, either,

1. As another instance of the liberty and power of God's providence in the disposal of human affairs, of which he spoke above, Ecc_9:1-3. Or,
2. As another of the vanities of this present life.

The race; either ability to run, or success and victory in running.

The battle; the victory in battle.

Men of understanding; who yet are most likely to get and to keep riches.

Favour; good acceptance and love from men.

Men of skill; who know how to manage themselves and all affairs, whereby they are necessary and serviceable to others, and therefore most likely to find favour in their eyes.

Time and chance happeneth to them all; there are some times or seasons unknown and casual to men, but certain and determined by God, in which alone he will give men success.

Ecclesiastes 9:12

His time, to wit, the time of his death, or of some other sore distress which God is bringing upon him; which is opposed to the time of success mentioned in the foregoing verse, and man is said to be ignorant both of the one and of the other.

That are taken in an evil net; that whilst they are sporting and feeding themselves, are suddenly and unexpectedly ensnared to their ruin.

When it falleth suddenly upon them; when they are most careless and secure.

Ecclesiastes 9:13

This wisdom have I seen; I have observed this among many other instances and effects of wisdom; which he seems to add for the commendation of wisdom, notwithstanding its insufficiency for man's safety and happiness without God's blessing.

It seemed great unto me; I judged it very praiseworthy, though others despised it, as it follows.

Ecclesiastes 9:14

It matters not whether this was a real history, or only a parable to represent the common practices of men in such cases.

Ecclesiastes 9:15

He was soon neglected, and his great service so far from being recompensed according to its merit, that both it and he were quite forgotten; which may be noted as another great vanity.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

Wisdom is better than strength, as was manifest in the foregoing instance.

The poor man's wisdom is despised, because men are generally vain and foolish, and have a greater value for outward ornaments than for true worth.

Ecclesiastes 9:17

Wise men, though poor, as may be gathered both from the foregoing relation, and because he is opposed to the *ruling fool* in the next clause, *are heard*, to wit, by wise men; or *should be heard*, as such words are oft taken, as Mal_1:6, and elsewhere; for that they were not always actually heard, he declared in the last words of the foregoing verse.

In quiet; uttered with a modest and low voice, to which the following cry is opposed.

The cry, the clamorous and senseless discourses, of him that ruleth among fools; of a rich and potent, but foolish man, who hath some influence upon fools, like himself, but is justly neglected, and his words disregarded, by wise men.

Ecclesiastes 9:18

Than weapons of war; than armed power.

Sinner; a wicked fool; by which expression and opposition of a sinner to a wise man he gives us a key to understand his meaning in divers places of his books, that by wisdom he means true piety, and by folly wickedness; and withal, showeth that sin, as it is the greatest folly, so it is more pernicious to men than mere folly properly so called.

Destroyeth much good; by his wicked counsels and courses brings much damage and mischief, both to himself and others.

Ecclesiastes 10:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 10

Observations on wisdom and folly, Ecc_10:1-3. Of rulers, Ecc_10:4-7. Of wrong and injustice, Ecc_10:8-10. Of talkativeness, imprudence, and its mischiefs, Ecc_10:11-15. Kings hurtful and desirable, Ecc_10:16,**17**. Of sloth, Ecc_10:18. Feasts, Ecc_10:19. The king must not be cursed, Ecc_10:20.

Dead flies falling into it, and abiding and being putrefied in it, especially in those countries, where there were more filthy and venomous flies, and where the ointments were more pure, and where the air was more hot, than in these parts.

So doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour; which comes to pass, partly because all the actions, and consequently the follies, of such men are most diligently observed, and soonest discerned, and tossed about in the mouths of men, whereas

fools and all their carriages are generally disregarded; and partly because of that envious and malicious disposition of men's minds, which makes them quick-sighted to discover, and glad to hear and forward to declare, the faults of such as by their greater eminency did outshine and obscure them.

Ecclesiastes10:2

A wise man's heart, i.e. his understanding or wisdom,

is at his right hand; is always present with him, and ready to direct him in all his actions. He manageth all his affairs prudently and piously. He mentions the right hand, because that is the chief and most common instrument of actions, which by most men are done with more strength, and expedition, and orderliness, and comeliness by their right hand than by their left.

A fool's heart at his left; his understanding and knowledge serves him only for idle speculation and vain ostentation, but is not at all useful or effectual to govern his affections and actions. He acts preposterously and foolishly, like one without heart, as it follows.

Ecclesiastes10:3

Walketh by the way; not only in great undertakings, but in his daily conversation with men, in his looks, and gestures, and common talk.

His wisdom faileth him; or, *he wants a heart* ; as if he had said, Did I say, his heart is at his left hand? I must recall it, for in truth he hath no heart in him.

He saith to every one that he is a fool; he publicly discovers his folly to all that meet him, or converse with him.

Ecclesiastes10:4

The spirit; the passion or wrath, as is manifest from the following words, which is oft called spirit, as Jud_8:3 2Ch_21:16 Pro_25:28 Ecc_7:9.

Leave not thy place, to wit, in anger or discontent. Withdraw not thyself rashly and hastily from his presence and service, according to the advice, Ecc_8:3. Continue in a diligent and faithful discharge of thy duty, as becomes a subject; do not return anger for anger, but modestly and humbly submit thyself to him.

Yielding, Heb. *healing* ; a gentle and submissive carriage, which is of a healing nature; whereas pride and passion do exasperate and widen the breach already made. *Pacifieth* , Heb. *maketh them to rest or cease* ; preventeth or removeth them.

Great offences, Heb. *great sins* ; either,

1. Such sins as the offended ruler might commit in the prosecution of his wrath against thee. Or rather,

2. Such as possibly thou hast committed against him, for which he is incensed against thee; or the greatest offences or injuries that one man commits against another, and much more those slight miscarriages of thine towards the ruler. Let not therefore a false opinion concerning his unreconcilableness to thee make thee desperate, and draw thee into rebellion.

Ecclesiastes10:5

I have observed another great vanity and misdemeanour amongst men.

As an error which proceedeth from the ruler; so the sense is, like those errors which rulers commonly commit. Or rather, which is *indeed an error proceeding from the ruler* ; for the following miscarriage must needs come from those who have power of conferring honour and power, &c. So the Hebrew *caph* is not a note of likeness, but of reality, as it is Jud_13:23 Neh_7:2 Hos_4:4 **5:10**, and oft elsewhere.

Ecclesiastes10:6

Folly is set in great dignity; foolish and unworthy persons are frequently advanced by the favour or humour of princes into places of highest trust and dignity, which is a great reproach and mischief to the prince, and a sore calamity to all his people. *The rich* ; wise and worthy men, as is evident, because these are opposed to fools in the former clause; such as are rich in endowments of mind. The ground of the expression may be this, that rich men are capable of all the advantages of men or books for the attainment of wisdom, and therefore are supposed to be wise in some measure.

Sit in low place; neglected and despised, or removed from those high places to which their merits had raised them.

Ecclesiastes10:7

Servants; men of a servile condition and disposition, who are altogether unfit for places of dignity.

Upon horses; riding upon horses, as a badge of their dignity, as Est_6:8,9 Jer 17:25 Eze_23:23.

Princes walking as servants upon the earth, which was the case of his own father, 2Sa_15:30.

Ecclesiastes10:8

He that diggeth a pit with this design, that another may unawares fall into it,

shall fall into it; shall through God's just judgment be destroyed by his own wicked devices.

Breaketh an hedge; whereby another man's fields, or vineyards, or orchards are distinguished and fenced, that he may either enter upon them, and take away their fruits, or by that means enlarge his own adjoining fields. Possibly he may have a particular respect unto magistrates or rulers, whom God hath hedged or fenced in, both with his own institution of magistracy, and with his laws, strictly requiring obedience from their subjects; and so he notes the danger of rising and rebelling against them.

A serpent, which oft lurks in hedges, and bites those who come within its reach.

Ecclesiastes10:9

Whoso removeth stones; either,

1. The stones which belong to others, and limit or distinguish their grounds, of which see Deu_27:17. Or,

2. Great stones too heavy for them; which rashly attempt things too high and hard for them; which seems better to agree with the following clause than the former interpretation doth.

Shall be hurt therewith; may easily receive hurt by the stones falling unexpectedly and violently upon him.

He that cleaveth wood, with an iron instrument, as the manner is, he being unskilful in that art. Possibly he designs a man who causeth discord and mischief among friends, or in a family, or kingdom.

Shall be endangered thereby; may peradventure cut himself.

Ecclesiastes10:10

The iron, to wit, the axe whereby he cut the wood, in the former verse, which by the danger there mentioned may be supposed to be sharp; but now, saith he, if it happen to be blunt.

Put to more strength; which is necessary to make it cut.

But wisdom is profitable to direct, Heb. *and wisdom* , &c. And as wisdom instructs a man in the smallest matters, as in this very matter of cutting of wood, where it teaches him in this case to use his utmost strength; so it is useful for a man's direction in all his great and weighty affairs. And so he insensibly slides into the commendation of wisdom, and the censure of folly, which is the principal design and business of this chapter.

Ecclesiastes10:11

Without enchantment; if not seasonably prevented by the art and care of the charmer; which practice he doth not justify, but only mention by way of resemblance. See on Psa_58:5.

A babbler, Heb. *a master of the tongue* ; which may be understood, either,

1. Of the detractor or slanderer, who like a serpent bites secretly; who may be so called, because he takes liberty to use his tongue as he lists, without any regard either to the offence of God, or to the injury of others; like them who said, *Our lips are our own* ; who is lord over us? But I do not see either why this phrase should be limited to the detractor, which equally belongs to all abusers of the tongue in any other way; or how this particular vice of detraction comes to be inserted here among things of a quite differing nature. Or,

2. Of an eloquent person, who may well be called *a master of the tongue* , or *of speech* , nothing being more usual in the Hebrew, than to call a man master of that which he excels in, or hath a full and free power to use. And this clause is and may be rendered thus, *And there is no excellency or profit to the master of the tongue* , i.e. the most eloquent person, who doth not understand and in due time use the charmer's art, cannot by all his eloquence afterward hinder the biting of the serpent, or mischievous effects of it; and so this agrees with the

principal scope of the chapter, which is to show the necessity and usefulness of wisdom, and the mischief of folly.

Ecclesiastes10:12

Gracious, Heb. *grace* ; as profitable, so also acceptable to others, procuring him favour with those who hear him.

Will swallow up himself; his discourses are ungracious and offensive to others, and therefore pernicious to himself.

Ecclesiastes10:13

All his talk from the beginning to the end is foolish and mischievous, and the more he talks, the more doth his folly appear; he proceeds from evil to worse, and adds wilfulness to his weakness, and never desists till he hath done mischief to himself or to others.

Ecclesiastes10:14

Full of words; either,

1. Talkative. Or,

2. Forward to promise and brag what he will do, which is the common practice of foolish men; he is a man of words, as we use to say. *Who can tell him* ? these words contain either,

1. A inimical representation of his folly in using vain repetitions of the same words, such as those,

a man cannot tell, & c., and *who can tell*, &c . Or,

2. A confutation of folly in promising or boasting of things which are wholly out of his power; for what shall be no man can either himself foreknow, or learn it from others.

Ecclesiastes10:15

Fools discover their folly, as by their words, of which he hath hitherto spoken, so also by their actions, and by their endless and fruitless endeavours after things which are too high and hard for them. For he is ignorant of those things which are most easy and most necessary for him, as of the way to the great city whither he is going, or obliged by his business to go, which being a great and beaten road, is known even to children and natural fools.

Ecclesiastes10:16

A child; either,

1. In age. Or,

2. (which is more agreeable to the following clause) In childish qualities, as ignorance, inexperience, injudiciousness, rashness, frowardness, fickleness, or wilfulness, and the like, in which sense this word is used, 2Ch_13:7, compared with 1Ki_14:21 Isa_3:4,**12** 1Co_14:20 Eph_4:14.

Thy princes eat; give up themselves to eating and drinking excessively and intemperately, as it is explained in the next verse. In the morning; the fittest time for God's service, and for the despatch of weighty affairs, and for sitting in judgment, Psa_101:8 Jer_21:12. Which circumstance is added as a plain evidence of men that wholly devote themselves to vanity and luxury; which must needs occasion gross neglect of the great concerns of the kingdom, the oppression of the people to support such extravagancies, and a woeful and general corruption of the people by their example, and otherwise; which makes him say, *Woe* to that people!

Ecclesiastes10:17

The son of nobles; not so much by birth, as even the worst of kings commonly are, and have been, as by their noble and worthy dispositions, and endowments, and carriages; for such a one is opposed to the child in the former verse. *Sons of nobles* are put for noble persons, as *the sons of men* for *men* , and *the sons of physicians* for *physicians* .

Eat in due season; so as may further, and not hinder, their main business.

For strength; to refresh and strengthen their natures, that they may be fit for action and business.

Not for drunkenness; not only nor chiefly to please their palates, and indulge themselves in sensuality.

Ecclesiastes10:18

That house which is neglected by its owner, and not repaired, must needs come to ruin; whereby he intimates that the sloth and carelessness of princes in the management of public affairs, which is a

usual attendant upon that luxury of which he hath now discoursed, is most destructive, both to themselves and to their people.

Ecclesiastes10:19

The design and effect of feasting and drinking wine is, that men may exhilarate their minds with the society of their friends, and with the use of the creatures.

Money answereth all things; it procures not only meat and drink for feasting, but for all other things; as the heavens are said to answer the earth, when they give it those showers which it desires and needs to make it fruitful, Hos_2:21. And this clause seems to be added as an aggravation of the sin and folly of luxury, because princes do thereby waste that money and treasure which is so highly necessary for the support and preservation of themselves, and of their kingdoms, and are forced to squeeze money out of their people by oppressive, and dishonourable, and dangerous practices, that they may have more to spend in riotous courses.

Ecclesiastes10:20

Curse not the king. Having spoken of the miscarriages of kings, he now gives a caution to their subjects, that they should not thence take occasion to speak irreverently or contemptuously of them, or wish or design any evil against their persons or government; for though vices may be condemned, wheresoever they are, yet both reverence and obedience are due to magistrates, as they are God's vicegerents and ordinances, notwithstanding their vices, as is manifest from Rom_13:1, &c.; 1Pe_2:13, &c.

In thy thought; in the most secret manner, by giving way to such thoughts or affections; for these will very probably break forth into such words and practices. *Curse not the rich*; the princes or governors under the king, who are commonly rich; or any other rich men, who can oppress or punish thee by their wealth, as well as kings can do it by their power.

In thy bed-chamber, where thy wife or servant may hear thee, and afterwards through folly or passion discover it to thy ruin.

A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter; the king will hear of it by unknown and unsuspected hands, as if a bird had chanted to be at the window when

thou didst speak the words, and did hear them, and carry the report of it unto the king. It is a proverbial expression, as when we say, *Hedges have ears*, and, *The walls will speak*. Hence kings are said to have long ears.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 11

Liberality to the poor commanded. We know not what we may come to: God giveth rain plentifully; and our time of doing good is short: not too much regarding difficulties: the providence of God is full of mysterious events; which must quicken us to duty and diligence, Ecc_11:1-6. Life sweet; but the days of death shall be many, Ecc_11:7,8. Young men are exhorted in the midst of their delights to think of the day of judgment, Ecc_11:9,10.

Cast thy bread upon the waters. Solomon having discovered divers vanities, and amongst others the vanity of heaping up riches, he now teacheth us that it is our interest as well as duty, not so much to lay them up, as to lay them out in pious and charitable uses; and having taught us the true and best use of worldly things, for our present comfort and benefit, which is to enjoy them with a cheerful and contented mind, he now directs us to the best improvement of them, for our future and greater advantage; and having acquainted us with our duty towards our superiors, he now directs us in our carriage towards our inferiors, and especially to such of them as are poor. The sense of these words is either,

1. *Cast thy seed* (which is here called bread, as it is also Job_28:5 Isa_28:28, and elsewhere) beside (for so the Hebrew particle *al* is oft used) the waters, i.e. either by the river's side, or in moist and waterish grounds, which usually are very fruitful. Or,

2.

Cast (freely and liberally bestow)

thy bread (i.e. thy money or provisions, which are oft signified by the name of *bread*. By saying *thy bread*, he cautions us that we give away only that which is our own, and not that which is another's; as they do who give either what they get from others by fraud or power, or what they owe to others, and are unable to pay, and so exercise charity to the hinderance of justice, or of the payment of their just debts)

upon the waters, i.e. upon those poor creatures upon whom, by reason of their unthankfulness or inability to make any returns to thee, it may seem to be as utterly lost as the seed which a man casts into the sea or river. This sense agrees much better,

1. With the words; for he doth not barely mention

the waters, (for then the particle *al* might have been translated *beside* ,) but *the face* , i.e. the surface or top, *of the waters* , in which and such-like cases *al* constantly signifies *upon* .

2. With the design and scope of the place, which is to persuade men to be liberal and charitable, notwithstanding the discouragements which they meet with in so doing, of which see the next clause, and the next verse.

Thou shalt find it; it shall not be lost, as covetous men, or thine own corrupt heart, may suggest, but it shall certainly be restored unto thee, either by God or by men, and that with great honour and advantage. This is added to prevent an objection, and to quicken us to the duty enjoined.

After many days; not immediately, but in due time, and when you least expect it. So you must be content to wait for it with patience, as the husbandman doth for the fruits of the earth.

Ecclesiastes 11:2

Give a portion; a part of thy estate or provisions. He alludes to the ancient custom, whereby the master of the feast did distribute several parts to each guest, and withal sent portions to the poor; of which custom see 2Sa_6:19 Neh_8:10,12 Es 9:22.

To seven, and also to eight; to as many as thou art able; a certain number for an uncertain, as Mic_5:5, and oft elsewhere.

Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth; great calamities may come, whereby thou mayst be brought to poverty, and so both utterly lose that blessed opportunity of doing good, which now thou hast in thine hands, whereby thou mayst gain unspeakable honour, and comfort, and advantage to thyself, and moreover need the charity of others, which thou mayst comfortably expect, either from men, or at least from the powerful providence of God, disposing the hearts of men to pity and help thee, if thou hast been kind and merciful to others; as,

on the contrary, they can expect no mercy from God or men, who have showed no mercy to others. Thus he not only answers, but retorts, the argument by which the covetous man excuseth his uncharitableness, because he must lay up against a rainy day.

Ecclesiastes11:3

If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: learn, O man, the practice of liberality from the very lifeless creatures, from the clouds; which when they are filled with water, do not hoard it up, or keep it to themselves, but plentifully pour it forth for the refreshment both of the fruitful field and of the barren wilderness.

In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be: these words contain either,

1. An argument to persuade men to charity, because they must shortly fall or die, and then all opportunity of being charitable will be lost, and they must expect certainly and eternally to reap whatsoever they have sown, whether it hath been mercy or unmercifulness. Or rather,
2. An answer to a common objection against it, because we are not certain whether the person who desires our charity doth really need it, or be worthy of it. To this he answers, As a tree when it falls, either by the violence of the wind, or being cut down by its owner's order, it is not considerable whether it falls southward or northward, for there it lies ready for the master's use; so thy charity, though it may possibly be misapplied by thee, or abused by the receiver, yet being conscientiously given by thee, it shall assuredly return to thee, and thou shalt reap the fruit of it.

Ecclesiastes11:4

He who neglects or delays the necessary works of sowing and reaping, because the weather is not exactly suitable to his desires, may possibly lose his harvest; whereby he intimates what is easily understood out of the foregoing verses, that men will never do good here, which is expressed by sowing, Psa_112:9 2Co_9:6, and consequently not receive good hereafter, Which is called *reaping*, Gal_6:7,8, if they be discouraged and hindered from it by every doubt or difficulty, such as covetous worldlings object to themselves, that others either do not want their charity, or with abuse it, that they may possibly need it hereafter.

Ecclesiastes11:5

Of the spirit; of the spirit or soul of man, how it first comes into the body of the child in the womb, whether from God by creation, or from the parents by propagation; nor how it is united with and so fixed in the body, that it cannot get out of it when it would; nor how and whither it goes out of the body; all which things are great mysteries. Others translate it, *of the wind, whence it cometh* , and whither it goeth, as is observed Joh_3:8, or how violently it will blow, or how long it will last. But the former translation seems to agree better with the following clause.

The bones, i.e. the whole body, which is elsewhere signified by the bones, as Psa_34:20 **35:10**, because they are a principal part, and the very foundation and support, of the body. Grow in the womb; how it comes to pass that one and the same small quantity of seed should diversify itself into skin, and flesh, and sinews, and veins, and bones, and entrails, or how it receiveth nourishment and growth.

The works of God; what God is doing, and will do with thee and others; the counsels and methods of God's providence in the future time of thy life, what evil God will send upon the earth, Ecc_11:2, or what weather he will send, of which Ecc_11:4, how long or how little a while God will continue thy life or estate, and how soon God will call thee to an account. These and many other future events thou canst not foresee, and therefore thy wisdom and duty is to cast off all distracting cares and distrustful fears about them, and cheerfully to commit thyself, and all thy affairs, into the hand of God in well doing.

Ecclesiastes 11:6

In the morning, and in the evening; early and late, in all seasons and occasions; do it speedily and continually, be not weary of it. *Sow thy seed* ; do all good works, and especially that of almsgiving, as sowing is understood, 2Co_9:6 Gal_6:7.

Withhold not thine hand from working or giving.

Whether shall prosper; which shall prosper most, as the next clause explains it; the positive degree being put for the comparative, or the superlative, which is not unusual in the Hebrew text. Which shall best answer thine end, or do most good to others, or which shall tend most to the comfort of thy great and last account; for thy morning alms may possibly be given to an unworthy person, or to one who did not need it, and will abuse it, and thy evening alms may fall upon a person of

eminent worth, yea, upon an angel in human shape, which is remembered as a motive to hospitality, Heb_13:2, or upon one in extreme necessity, who might possibly have perished both in soul and body, if thou hadst not comforted and relieved him: or one time thou mayst give with more sincere intention, and with more tender compassion, than another time, and so one will be more right and more acceptable to God than the other.

Alike good; equally successful to the receiver, or to the giver.

Ecclesiastes 11:7

It cannot be denied that this present life (which is called *light*, Job_3:20 **33:30** Psa_56:13, and which is expressed synecdochically, by seeing the sun, Ecc_6:5 **7:11**) is in itself a great blessing, and very desirable; but it is not perpetual nor satisfactory; which is here implied and expressed in the next verse.

Ecclesiastes 11:8

Live many years; which is a privilege granted but to few persons comparatively.

And rejoice in them all; and suppose he enjoy all the comforts, and escape all the embitterments, of human life, all his days; which also is a great rarity.

Let him remember, it is his duty and interest seriously to consider, the days of darkness; of death, or of the state of the dead, which is oft expressed by darkness, as Job_10:21 Psa_88:12, &c., and here is opposed to the foregoing *light*.

They shall be many, i.e. far more than the days of this short life, especially if to the time of lying in the grave be added that greater and utter darkness which is reserved for impenitent sinners, and which is everlasting, Mat_22:13 **25:30** 2Pe_2:17 Jud_1:13. And this is added for the caution of mankind, that they may not rejoice excessively in, nor content themselves with, the happiness of the present life, but may seek for something more durable, and more satisfactory.

All that cometh; all things which befall any man belonging only to this life, whether they be comfortable or vexatious, they are but vain and inconsiderable, because they are short and transitory.

Ecclesiastes 11:9

This verse is to be understood either,

1. As a serious advice to this purpose, Seeing life is short and transitory, improve it to the best advantage, take comfort in it whilst you may, only do it with moderation, and the fear of God. Or rather,

2. As an ironical concession, such as are usual both in Scripture, as 1Ki_18:27 **22:15** Eze_28:3,4 **Mt 26:45**, and in other authors; for this agrees much better with the context, and with the expressions here used. And so the sense is, I foresee what evil use some men will make of what I have now said. Things being thus, *let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die* ; as they also reasoned, 1Co_15:32.

O young man; he speaks to young men particularly, because they have both the greatest ability and the strongest inclinations to pursue sensual pleasures, and are most impatient either of restraint or admonition.

Let thy heart cheer thee; indulge thy frolic and jolly humour, and take thy fill of delights.

Walk in the way of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; whatsoever thine eye or heart lusteth after, deny it not to them; as this phrase is taken. Num_15:39, nor is it ever used in a good sense. Compare Job_31:7 Psa_81:12 Jer_18:12 2Pe_2:14 1Jo_2:16. *But know thou* ; but in the midst of thy feasting and jollity it will become thee, if thou art a reasonable creature, to consider thy reckoning, and whether thou dost not purchase thy gold too dear.

For all these things, for all thy follies and sinful lusts, which thou slightest as tricks of youth,

God will bring thee into judgment; will force thee to appear before his judgment-seat, to give a serious account of all thy youthful and exorbitant courses, and to receive that sentence which thy own conscience will then say thou dost justly deserve. And if thou likest thy sensuality upon these terms, much good may it do thee; I do not envy thee, nor desire to partake of thy delicacies.

Ecclesiastes 11:10

Sorrow, i.e. sensual and disorderly lusts, which he elegantly and emphatically calls sorrow, with respect to the foregoing words, to intimate, that although such practices do at present gratify and delight men's senses and vain minds, yet they will shortly and certainly bring a

man to intolerable and eternal sorrows, which it is thy wisdom to prevent. *Sorrow* ; or, as it is rendered in the margin, and by divers others, *anger* ; a passion to which men are most prone in the heat of youth; whereby he may understand either anger against him for this sharp admonition; or rather against God, who hath laid such severe restraints upon them, and threatens such punishments to them for following their own natural inclinations. So the sense is, Do not quarrel with thy Judge, but submit and make thy peace with him by declaring war against all thy sins.

Evil; all evil concupiscences or lusts, which though now they seem good to thee, will another day appear to be very evil and bitter things.

From thy flesh; from thy bodily members; which he mentions not exclusively, as if he would allow them their spiritual evils; but emphatically, because young men, to whom he is here speaking, are most given to fleshly or bodily lusts.

Childhood and youth are vanity, i.e. most vain, either,

1. In their temper and dispositions. Young men are frothy, and foolish, and inconsiderate, whereby they run into manifold dangers, and therefore they shall do well to hearken to the counsels of those who by their greater wisdom and experience are more capable judges of these matters. Or,

2. In their condition. The time of youth is vanishing and transitory, and old age and death will speedily come, against which every man in his wits will take care to lay in solid provisions and comforts.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 12

Early piety recommended before old age come on and death be near: old age described, and death, Ecc_12:1-7. The conclusion: all is vanity, Ecc_12:8. The preacher's end in this book, Ecc_12:9-12. The sum of all learning, experience, and happiness is to fear God, and keep his commandments, because God will bring all to judgment, Ecc_12:13,14.

Remember, to wit, practically, or so as to fear, and love, and faithfully serve and worship him, which when men do not they are said to forget God, Psa_9:17 **106:21**, and in many other places.

Thy Creator; the first author and continual preserver of thy life and being, and of all the perfections and enjoyments which accompany it, to

whom thou hast the highest and strongest obligations to do so, and upon whom thou hast a constant and necessary dependence, and therefore to forget him is most unnatural, and inhuman, and disingenuous.

In the days of thy youth; for then thou art most able to do it, and thou owest the best of thy time and strength to God; then thou hast opportunity to do it, and thou mayst not live to old age; then it will be most acceptable to God, and most comfortable to thyself, as the best evidence of thy sincerity, and the best provision for old age and death; and then it is most necessary for the conquering those impetuous lusts and passions which drown so many thousands of young men in perdition, both in this life and in that to come.

The evil days; the time of old age, which is evil, i.e. burdensome and calamitous in itself, and far more grievous and terrible when it is loaded with the sad remembrance of a man's youthful follies and lusts, and with the dreadful prospect of approaching death and judgment, which makes him see that he cannot live, and yet dare not die, and with the consideration and experience of the hardness of his heart, which in that age is rarely brought to true repentance, and so generally expires either in vain presumption, or in hellish desperation.

I have no pleasure in them; my life is now bitter and burdensome to me, and worse than death; which is frequently the condition of old age.

Ecclesiastes 12:2

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, Heb. *While the sun, and the light, and the moon*, &c. That clause, *and the light*, seems to be added to signify that he speaks of the darkening of the sun, and moon, and stars, not in themselves, or in their own bodies, but only in respect of that light which they afford to men. And therefore the same clause which is expressed after the sun, is to be understood after the moon and stars, as is very usual in Scripture in like cases. And those expressions are to be understood either,

1. Literally, of the dim-sightedness of old men, by reason whereof the light of the sun, &c. seems dark to them; which seems not to agree with the context, partly because the dimness of their sight is expressed in the next verse, and partly because both his and the following verses are wholly allegorical. Or rather,

2. Figuratively, and that either,

1. Of the outward parts of the body, and especially of the face, the beauty of the countenance, the lightsome and pleasant complexion of the cheeks, the liveliness of the eyes, which are compared to the sun, and moon, and stars, and which are obscured in old age, as the Chaldee paraphrast understands it. Or,

2. Of the inward parts of the mind, the understanding, fancy, memory, which may not unfitly be resembled to the sun, and moon, and stars, and all which are sensibly decayed in most old men. For it may seem improbable that Solomon in his description of the infirmities of old age should omit the decays of the most noble part of man, which are commonly incident to old age. And yet, with submission to those worthy persons who think otherwise, it seems not necessary that he should here speak of those inward decays, partly, because they are not so general in old men as the decays of the body are; partly, because he here directeth his speech to sensual men, who are more affected with corporal than with intellectual maladies; and partly, because both the foregoing and following passages concern the state of men's bodies, and their outward condition. Or rather,

3. Of external things, and of the great change of their joy and prosperity, which they had in their youthful time, into sorrow and manifold calamities, which are usually the companions of old age; for this interpretation seems best to agree both with the foregoing verse, in which he describes the miseries of old age, and with the following clause, which is added to explain and determine those otherwise ambiguous expressions; and with the Scripture use of this phrase, which is the best key for the understanding of Scripture; for a state of comfort and happiness is oft described by the light of the sun, &c., as Jud_5:31 2Sa_23:4 Isa_30:26 **60:20**, and a time and state of great trouble is set forth by the darkening of the light of the sun, &c., as Isa_13:9, &c.; Isa_24:23 Joe_2:10 **3:15** Mat_24:29, and oft elsewhere.

Nor the clouds return after the rain: this phrase notes a perpetual succession and reciprocation of rain, and clouds bringing rain, and then rain and clouds again, and so without end; whereby he expresseth either,

1. The rheums or defluations which do abundantly and incessantly flow in and from old men, for want of natural heat and strength to prevent or remove them. Or rather,

2. The continual vicissitude of infirmities, diseases, and griefs in old men, one deep calling upon another, and one affliction beginning at the end of another; whereas in young men after rain the clouds are dispersed, and fair weather succeeds.

Ecclesiastes12:3

The keepers of the house, i.e. of the body, which is oft and fitly compared to a house, as Job_4:19 Psa_119:54 2Co_5:1; whose *keepers* here are either,

1. The ribs and bones into which they are fastened, which are the guardians of the inward and vital parts, which also are much weakened and shaken by old age. Or rather,

2. The hands and arms, which are man's best instruments to defend his body from the assaults of men or beasts, and which in a special manner are subject to this trembling, by paralytical or other like distempers, that are most incident to old men.

The strong men; either the back, or the thighs and legs, in which the main strength of the body doth consist, which in old men are very feeble, and unable both for the support of the body and for motion.

The grinders; the teeth, those especially which are commonly so called, because they grind the meat which we eat.

Cease, to wit, to perform their office,

because they are few, Heb. *because they are diminished* , either,

1. In strength. Or,

2. In number; being here one, and there another, and not united together, and one directly against another, and consequently unfit for their work.

Those that look out of the windows; the eyes. By windows he understands either,

1. The holes in which the eyes are fixed, Zec_14:12. Or,

2. The eye-lids, which, like windows, are either opened or shut. Or,

3. Those humours and coats of the eyes noted by anatomists, which are the chief instruments by which the eye sees.

Ecclesiastes 12:4

The doors be shut in the streets; or, *towards the streets* ; which lead into the streets. This is understood either,

1. Literally; because men, when they are very old, keep much at home, and have neither strength nor inclination to go abroad. Or rather,

2. Allegorically, as all the other clauses are understood. And so *the doors* are either,

1. The outward senses, which, as doors, let in outward objects to the soul. Or rather,

2. The mouth, or the two lips, here expressed by a word of the dual number, which are oft called a *door* , both in Scripture, as Psa_141:3 Mic_7:5, and in other authors, which, like a door, open or shut the way which leads into the streets or common passages of the body, such as the gullet, and stomach, and all the bowels, as also the windpipe and lungs; which also are principal instruments both of speaking and eating. And these are said to be *shut* , not simply and absolutely, as if they did never eat, or drink, or speak; but comparatively, because men in extreme old age grow dull and listless, having little or no appetite to eat, and are very much indisposed for discourse, and speak but seldom.

When the sound of the grinding is low; or, because the sound, &c. So this may be added, not as a new symptom of old age, but only as the reason of the foregoing symptom. The sense is, When or because the teeth, called the grinders, Ecc_12:3, are loose and few, whereby both his speech is low, and the noise which he makes in eating is but small. And this is one great cause of his indisposedness both to eating and to speaking. Some understand this of concoction, which after a sort doth grind the meat in the stomach, and in the other parts appointed by God for that work. But that is transacted inwardly, and without all noise or sound.

He shall rise up, to wit, from his bed, being weary with lying, and unable to get sleep,

at the voice of the bird; either,

1. Upon the smallest noise; which doth not consist with that deafness incident to old men, and described in the next words. Or rather,

2. As soon as the birds begin to chirp, which is early in the morning, whereas children and young men can lie and sleep long in the morning.

The daughters of music; all those senses or parts of the body which are employed in music and song, as well those which make it, as the parts of and within the mouth, as those which receive it, to wit, the ears.

Shall be brought low; shall be cast down from their former excellency; they are become incapable either of making music, or of delighting in it.

Ecclesiastes 12:5

They shall be afraid; the passion of fear is observed to be most incident to old men, of which divers reasons may be given.

Of that which is high; either,

1. Of high things, lest they should fall upon them. Or rather,

2. Of high places, of going up hills or stairs, which is very irksome to them, because of their weakness, and weariness, and giddiness, and danger, or dread of falling. And this clause, together with the next, may be rendered thus, and that agreeably to the Hebrew text,

Also they shall be afraid and terrified (two words expressing the same thing, which is very frequent in the Hebrew) *of that which is high in the way* . When they walk abroad, they will dread to go up any high or steep places.

And fears shall be in the way, lest as they are walking, they should stumble, or fall, or be thrust down, or some infirmity or mischief should befall them.

The almond tree shall flourish; their heads shall be as full of grey hairs as the almond tree is of white flowers. Such metaphors are not unusual in other authors. Hence Sophocles calls a grey or hoary head *flowery* , and again, *covered with white flowers* .

The grasshopper shall be a burden, if it doth accidentally hop up and rest upon them. They cannot endure the least burden, being indeed a burden to themselves. But the words may be, and are by others, rendered, *the locust* (as the ancient interpreters and many others render

it; or, as ours and some others, *the grasshopper* , which comes to the same thing; for these two sorts of insects are much of the same nature and shape) *shall be a burden to itself* . And by the *locust* or *grasshopper* may be understood, either,

1. The old man himself, who bears some resemblance to it; in shape, by reason of the bones sticking out; in the constitution of the body, which is dry and withering; and in the legs and arms, which are slender, the flesh being consumed. Or,

2. The back, which fitly follows after the head, upon which the almond tree flourished, in which the strength of the body lay, and which formerly was able to bear great burdens, but now, through its weakness and crookedness, is a burden too heavy for itself. And some of the Jewish and other interpreters understand this word, which others render *locust* or *grasshopper* , to be some part of the body, either the *backbone* , or *the head of the thigh bone* , or *the ankle-bone* , any of which may well be said to be heavy or burdensome to itself, when it moves slowly and listlessly, and not without difficulty and trouble. *Desire* , to wit, of meats, and drinks, and music, and other carnal delights, which are vehemently desired by men in the heat of their youth, but are unsavoury to old men; of which see an instance 2Sa_19:35. It is true, the former expressions are metaphorical, but the two next following are proper, and to be understood literally; and so may this clause also.

Man goeth, is travelling towards it, and every day nearer to it than other,

to his long home; from this place of his pilgrimage into the grave, from whence he must never return into this world, and into the state and place of the future life, which is unchangeable and everlasting.

The mourners; either such as were hired to that end, of whom **See Poole** "Jer_9:17"; **See Poole** "Mat_9:23", **See Poole** "Mat_11:17", or true mourners, near relations, and dear friends, accompany the dead corpse through the streets to the grave.

Ecclesiastes12:6

This verse is to be understood either,

1. literally, of the ornaments of life, such as chains, and jewels, and vessels of gold and silver, and of the instruments by which the necessary provisions and supports of life are conveyed to us, such as

fountains of water, and pitchers, &c.; which may be said to be loosed or broken, because they are neglected as useless things to the dead man. Or rather,

2. Allegorically, of those inward parts of man's body which are the chief instruments of life, or sense and motion, and of the vital or animal operations, whether such from which they first proceed, or in which they are first elaborated and contained, which may fitly be compared to a *bowl*, and *fountain*, or *cistern*; or such by which they are derived or conveyed to the several parts of the body, which are very conveniently designed by the *cord*, and *pitcher*, and *wheel*; all which are truly said to be *loosed* or *broken*, i.e. dissolved, or become useless and insufficient for the performance of their several functions. This in the general. But it seems most probable that Solomon, who was so profound a philosopher, and doubtless had an accurate knowledge of all the parts of man's body, and their several offices and operations, doth by these several expressions describe so many particular parts and offices. By

the silver cord, it is generally and most probably conceived that he understands the pith or marrow of the back-bone, which comes from the brain, and thence goeth down to the very lowest end of the back-bone, together with the nerves and sinews, which, as anatomists observe, are nothing else but the production and continuation of the marrow. And this is most aptly compared to a *cord*, both for its figure, which is very long and round, and for its use, which is to draw and move the parts of the body; and to silver, both for its excellency and colour, which is white and bright, even in a dead, and much more in a living body. And this may properly be said to be

loosed, or *dissolved*, or *broken*, or *removed*, as others render the word, the sense of all these translations being the same, because it is relaxed, or obstructed, or otherwise disenabled for its proper service. And answerably hereunto, by the

golden bowl he understands the membranes of the brain, and especially that innermost membrane which is called by anatomists *the pious mother*, because it doth with a motherly care defend the brain, and assist and govern its actions, which insinuates itself into all the parts of the brain, following it in its various windings and turnings, keeping each parcel of it in its proper place, and distinguishing and dividing one

part from another, to prevent disorder and mischief. This is not unfitly called a *bowl* , partly because it is round, and partly because it receives and contains in it all the substance of the brain; and a *golden bowl*, partly, for its great preciousness and usefulness; partly, for its ductility, being drawn out into a great thinness or fineness, as gold is capable of being drawn forth into thinner plates than other metals can bear; and partly, for its colour, which is somewhat yellow, and comes nearer to that of gold than any other part of the body doth. And this is well said to be

broken, as for the reason above noted, so because upon the approach of death it is commonly shrivelled up, and many times broken. And as these two former clauses concern the brain and the animal powers, so the two following clauses of this verse respect the spring and seat of the vital powers and operations, and of the blood, the great instrument thereof, which hath been commonly conceived, and consequently is here understood, to be the liver, but more truly and certainly is the heart, which is now known and confessed to be the source of the blood. And so Solomon here describes the chief organs or vessels appointed for the production, and distribution, and circulation of the blood in man's body. For although the doctrine of the circulation of the blood hath lain hid and unknown for very many generations together, and therefore the honour of the invention of it is justly ascribed to a famous physician of our country, yet it is not improbably supposed by some that it was well known to Solomon, although after his times it was lost, as doubtless many other things were, which he wrote concerning plants, and other things. According to this notion

the fountain here is the right ventricle of the heart, which is now acknowledged to be the spring of life, and of the vital spirits, and the pitcher is the veins which convey the blood from it to other parts, and especially that arterious vein, as anatomists call it, by which it is transmitted to the lungs, and thence to the left ventricle of the heart, where it is better elaborated, and then by the pulse thrust out into the great artery, called *arteria aorta* , and by its branches dispersed into all the parts of the body, to give them life and vigour, which being done, the residue of the blood is carried back by the veins into the right ventricle of the heart, whence it is disposed, as hath been now mentioned, and so runs in a perpetual round, unless it be obstructed by some disorder in the body. And the

cistern is the left ventricle of the heart, and the

wheel seems to be the great artery which is joined to it, which is very fitly so called, because it is the first and great instrument of this rotation or circulation of the blood, which by its pulse is forcibly thrust out into all the parts of the body, whence by various windings and turnings it returns thither again, and so is sent again upon the same journey, which in like manner it performs again and again, as long as life and health continue; and when any of these parts are disenabled for the discharge of their offices, then are they fitly said to be broken. The

pitcher may be said to be

broken at the fountain, when the veins do not return the blood to the heart, but suffer it to stand still and cool within them, whence comes that coldness of the outward parts, which is a near forerunner of death. And the wheel may be said to be

broken at the cistern, when the great arteries do not perform their office of conveying the blood lute the left ventricle of the heart, and of thrusting it out thence into the lesser arteries, whence comes that ceasing of the pulse, which is a certain sign of approaching death.

Ecclesiastes12:7

The dust; the body, called *dust* , both for its original, which was from the dust, and to signify its vile and corruptible nature, Job_4:19 **30:19** Psa_103:14.

Return to the earth as it was; whence it was first taken. He alludes to that passage, Gen_3:19. *The spirit* ; the soul of man, frequently so called, as Gen_2:7 Psa_31:5, &c., because it is of a spiritual or immaterial nature.

Return unto God; into his presence, and before his tribunal, that there it may be sentenced to its everlasting habitations, either to abide with God for ever, if it be approved by him, or otherwise to be eternally shut out from his presence and favour.

Who gave it, to wit, in a peculiar manner, by his creating power: for in a general sense *God giveth to every seed his own belly* , 1Co_15:38; hence he is called *the Father of spirits* , Heb_12:9.

Ecclesiastes12:8

This sentence, wherewith he began this book, he here repeateth in the end of it partly as that which he had proved in all the foregoing discourse, and partly as that which naturally and necessarily followed from both the branches of the assertion now laid down, Ecc_12:7.

Ecclesiastes12:9

The preacher was wise; which he affirmeth not out of vain ostentation, but partly to procure the more credit and acceptance to his doctrine and, counsel here delivered; and partly to declare his repentance for his former follies, and God's great mercy in restoring his wisdom to him.

Taught the people knowledge; as God gave him this wisdom, that he might be a teacher of others, so he used it to that end; therefore despise not his counsel.

He gave good heed; he did not rashly and foolishly utter whatsoever came into his mind or mouth, but seriously pondered both his matter and words.

Sought out; both by the exercise of his own mind, and by reading and learning from others.

Set in order; or, *directed* or *fitted* . He selected such as were most useful.

Many proverbs; excellent and wise sayings, which are oft called proverbs, as was noted before upon the Book of Proverbs.

Ecclesiastes12:10

Acceptable words, Heb. *desirable* or *delightful* , worthy of all acceptation, such as would minister comfort and profit so the hearers or readers.

Written by the preacher in this and his other books.

Upright, Heb. *right* or *straight* , agreeable to the mind or will of God, which is the rule of right, not crooked or perverse.

Words of truth; not fables cunningly devised to deceive the simple, but true and certain doctrines, which commend themselves to men's own consciences or reasons; wholesome and edifying counsels.

Ecclesiastes12:11

The words of the wise; not of secularly or politically wise men, but of the spiritually wise and holy men of God; of which, and not of the former, this whole context treats.

As goads, and as nails, piercing into men's dull minds and hard hearts, and quickening and provoking them to the practice of all their duties.

Fastened; which do not only amuse and startle men for the present, as the wise and grave counsels of moral philosophers frequently do, but make powerful and abiding impressions in them; which is the peculiar effect of God's word.

By the masters of assemblies; by the teachers of God's church and people, whether prophets or others, appointed by God for that work.

Which are given from one shepherd; from God, or from Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd and Teacher of the church in all ages, by whose Spirit the ancient prophets, as well as other succeeding teachers, were inspired and taught, Jer_3:15 1Pe_1:11 2Pe_1:21. And this clause seems to be added partly as the reason of that admirable harmony and agreement which is amongst all the men of God in all ages and places, because they are all taught by one Master, and guided by the same hand; and partly to oblige us to the greater attention and reverence to all their doctrines and counsels, which we are to receive as the word of God, and not of men only, as it is said, 1Th_2:13.

Ecclesiastes12:12

By these; by these wise men, and their words or writings, of which he spoke in the foregoing verse.

Be admonished; take your instructions from them, for their words are right and true, as he said, Ecc_12:10, whereas the words of other men are false, or at best doubtful.

Of making many books there is no end; I could easily write many books and large volumes upon these matters, but that were an endless and needless work, seeing things necessary to be known and done lie in a little compass, as he informs us in the next verse.

Much study; the reading of many books written by learned philosophers about these things; which it is more than probable were then extant, though since lost, which also Solomon, being so curious

and inquisitive a person, would in all likelihood procure anti peruse as far as he hail opportunity.

Is a weariness to the flesh; it wasteth a man's strength and spirits, and yet (which is implied) doth not satisfy the mind, nor sufficiently recompense the trouble and inconvenience to which man is exposed by it.

Ecclesiastes12:13

The conclusion of the whole matter; the sum and substance of all that hath been said or written by wise men, so far as it is necessary for us to know.

Fear God; which is synecdoically put here, as it is very frequently in Scripture, for all the inward worship of God, reverence, and love, and trust, and a devotedness of heart to serve and please God, and a loathness to offend him, and an aptness to tremble at his word and judgments.

Keep his commandments: this is fitly added as a necessary effect and certain evidence of the fear, of God. Make conscience of practising whatsoever God requires, how costly, or troublesome, or dangerous soever it be.

The whole duty; in the Hebrew it is only, *the whole* ; it is his whole work and business, his whole perfection and happiness, it is the sum of what he need either know, or do, or enjoy.

Ecclesiastes12:14

For God shall bring every work into judgment: this is added either,

1. As a reason of what he last said,

this is the whole of man, because all men must give an account to God of all their works, and this alone will enable them to do that with joy, and not with grief. Or,

2. As another argument to press the foregoing exhortation, Fear God, and keep his commandments, for you must be called to judgment about it, &c.

With every secret thing; not only outward and visible actions, but even inward and secret thoughts.