

**Summary of Ecclesiastes**  
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The book deals with two paradoxes. The answer to each is the positive exhortation to take the simple blessings that God gives. At the center is a reminder that though sorrow is an inevitable part of life in a fallen world, we can bear it if we recognize that it comes from the hand of God.

A. The Paradox of the Values. The things that men value (pleasure, status, wealth) cannot guarantee happiness, though when we view them from the divine perspective, we see some value in them. Two panels, the first from a purely human perspective, the second adding the divine insight.

1. 1:3-2:23, the human view.

- a) 1:3-11, The Cycles. Thus no comprehensive knowledge, nothing new, no certain fame. The cyclic nature of the world is to the unbeliever a source of frustration and confusion.
- b) 1:12-2:23, Qohelet's Search: Lust of the Flesh (2:1), Pride of Life (2:12), Lust of Eyes (2:18).

2. 2:24-6:9, the divine perspective.

- a) 2:24-3:22, Answer to Cycles: God's sovereignty in the cycles of life.  
POSITIVES: 2:24a; 3:12; 3:22a form the center and extremes of this section, which is chiasmic. Lund's law.
- b) 4:1-6:9, Answer to the three values: Though none of the three is trustworthy, each can bring value if rightly used.
  - 1) 4:1-12, Principles of Companionship, related to lust of flesh: oppression, envy, loneliness, true friendship.
  - 2) 4:13-5:9, Authorities, cf. pride of life: Kings, God, Bureaucracies (good in middle, bad on outside).
  - 3) 5:10-6:9, Wealth, cf. lust of eyes: It brings only dissatisfaction, and can be lost. Trust in God, who gives the true wealth.  
POSITIVE: 5:18-20, center of chiasm.

B. 6:10-7:14, What is good? Sorrow! We can't avoid it, because the world is full of vanity, but it is the Creator who has subjected it to vanity (Rom. 8:20), and trusting in his sovereign love, we can cope with the sorrow and even learn that, like castor oil, "it is good for you."

C. The Paradox of the Virtues. We should pursue righteous labor and wisdom, even though we may not benefit from them

personally, because these are God's will for us.

1. First praise of virtues.
    - a) 7:15-29, The benefit of true righteousness, and the danger of false righteousness and false wisdom.
    - b) 8:1-14, The benefit of Wisdom: enables us to understand the paradoxes of wickedness.
    - c) POSITIVE: 8:15, at end of section.
  
  2. 8:16-9:18, Man is impotent to help himself either through wisdom or labor.  
POSITIVE: 9:7-9, center of "man cannot do" chiasm.
  
  3. Second praise of virtues.
    - a) 9:13-10:15, The benefit of wisdom
    - b) 10:16-11:6, The benefit of labor
    - c) 11:7-12:8, POSITIVE: the conclusion: enjoy the good in life and expect the bad.
- D. 12:9-14, Epilog.