

An Evil Under the Sun

By Elder David Pyles

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease. – Eccl 6:1-3

Solomon complained here of people in the world who have failed to find happiness notwithstanding the fact they have been abundantly blessed in material ways. He claimed such cases are numerous. There are likely even more of them in our own prosperous times than then.

The remainder of the book of Ecclesiastes will show that Solomon was himself such a person. He sought happiness in mirth, in accumulation, in enterprise and in education, but all these proved futile avenues in his quest. After learning from these hard experiences, and after long examination of himself and those about him, Solomon concluded that happiness is a direct gift from the hand of God. This is why the poorest of the poor can have it, while the richest of the rich can be in misery. Riches, knowledge, etc, are also gifts of God, but they of themselves do not convey happiness. Happiness is a separate gift unto itself. So the text above complains of those who have been blessed in a material way, but have not been blessed to enjoy their possessions (i.e. they have not been given the “*power to eat thereof*”).

Yet God is not arbitrary in how He bestows the blessing of happiness. Solomon considered this subject in the preceding verse:

Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart. – Eccl 5:19-20

Key words here are “*God answereth him in the joy of his heart.*” The meaning is that God responds to the man’s prayer and obedience by giving him both possessions and a heart that is capable of rejoicing in what he has been given. The man is happy with his possessions, yet not on account of those possessions, but because of his obedience to God. The man does “*not much remember the days of his life*” in the sense that the inevitable

hardships and losses of life do not burden or scar his mind. He is happy notwithstanding them.

Paul said, “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned...*” (1Tim 1:5). These things are the “end” of divine commandment in the sense that they are the ultimate purpose for which the commandment was given. All of these three objectives have to do with feelings. “Charity” is how we feel about others. “Good conscience” is how we feel about ourselves, and “faith” is how we feel about God. The key to feeling right is therefore in doing right. A man is happy not because of what he has, but because of what he does.