**The Seven Counsels of Enjoyment in Ecclesiastes**

1. **The Basic Question for Exploration**

See Eccl 1:2-3: ***“Merest breath (breath of breaths)!” says the Teacher. “All is just a breath! What is the profit for a person in all the work at which he works under the sun?”***

* Riddle: vivid image for what is fleeting, insubstantial, beyond human grasp and control
* Usual translations: vanity, meaninglessness
* Hebrew word: breath, vapour, puff of air, gust of wind
* Audit of profit from work
* Work under the sun = profit from work in life on earth
* Ecclesiastes: “the confessions of a workaholic”

1. **The Seven Counsels for Enjoyment**

* **First counsel in 2:24-26: *There is nothing as good for a person as to eat and drink and to look for (discover) what is good in his work. This also, I have seen, is from the hand of God, for apart from Him who can eat and have enjoyment? For to him who is good before Him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the task of gathering and collecting only to give it to the one who is good before God. This too is but a breath and chasing the wind.***
* Question: what’s **good** in our ordinary life on earth?
* Simple answer: meals and work
* Close connection: work for food and its enjoyment and enjoyment of food for enjoyment of work
* Problem: work as burden ►need to look for what’s good **in** our work to discover and enjoy it because we fail to notice it since we are preoccupied with what we have to do
* Common problem: enjoyment from work rather than enjoyment of work
* The good person before God = the person that pleases Him, the person who has His approval for what he is doing
* Enjoyment as **God’s gift** to those who please him: wisdom as the practical knowledge of what gives joy and experience of rejoicing
* God’s treatment of sinners who miss out on His approval: work without joy for the benefit of those who please God
* The pursuit of possessions without enjoyment of them
* **Second counsel in 3:9-13: *What profit is there for a worker in his work? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of Adam to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful (pleasant) in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that no person can find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing as good for them as to rejoice and do what is good in his life. It is also a gift of God that any person can eat and drink and see what is good in his work.***
* Read the poem on the times and seasons for human life on earth in 3:1-8
* Question: profit in work rather than profit from work
* God’s time for human work, so that everything is beautiful and enjoyable in its time
* Human desire for anything good to last forever
* Frustration because we cannot see the big picture of God’s plan for us and the world
* Living in the moment of enjoyment which whets our appetite for eternal joy: little foretastes of eternity
* Knowledge of four good things for a wise person
* Rejoicing in daily life
* Doing good work: working well
* God’s gift of daily food and drink
* God’s gift of insight into what’s good in his work
* **Third counsel in 3:22a: *So I have seen that there is nothing as good as that a person should rejoice in his deeds, for that is his lot.***
* Deeds = what a person does and what is produced by what he does
* Key picture: lot, portion, allotment. See also 2:10, 21; 5:18, 19; 9:6, 9.
* Original sense: God’s allotment of a portion of land to each family of the Israelites for him to provide for their livelihood = necessities and luxuries
* New sense: God’s allotment of joy and rejoicing by his provision of work and leisure
* Best life = life of rejoicing in what we do each day
* **Fourth counsel in 5:18-20: *Indeed I myself have seen that is good, that is beautiful ( pleasant), to eat and drink and rejoice and see what is good in one’s work which one does under the sun the few days that God has given him, for that is his lot. It is also a gift of God that anyone whom God has given wealth and possessions has ability (capacity) to eat from them and to accept his lot and rejoice in his work. For he will hardly remember/notice the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.***
* Summary of first three passages in first sentence with an emphasis on the limited time for rejoicing in life here on earth
* Three additional abilities as gifts from God as well as money and property
* Appetite for food: see loss of appetite with depression
* Acceptance of allotted work and leisure: contentment rather than dissatisfaction
* Rejoicing in work
* Result of these three abilities
* Present engrossment in work that does not notice the passing of time: opposite to boredom
* Gift of joy as a foretaste of eternity
* **Fifth counsel in 8:15: *So I myself recommend joy (rejoicing), for there is nothing as good for a person under the sun as to eat and drink and rejoice, so that that will encircle him like a wreathe in his work all the days that God has given him under the sun.***
* First conclusion: recommendation of rejoicing
* Shift from “I have seen” to “I recommend”
* Picture of wreathe on a person’s head: symbol of divine acceptance and approval
* Occasional rejoicing in God’s gift of joy as at the three Jewish festivals or at weddings or meals ► continual rejoicing in all the work that God gives to do for the whole of life
* **Sixth counsel in 9:7-10: *Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart (good conscience), for God has already approved your works (what you do). Let your clothes always be white and let perfume not be lacking on your head. See (experience) life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of your breath-like life which He has given to you under the sun – all your breath-like days, for that is your lot in life and in your work at which you work under the sun. Whatever you hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no doing or planning or knowing or wisdom in the underworld (grave) where you are going.***
* Second conclusion: six directives as keys to enjoyment
* Eating with joy and drinking with a good conscience: God’s marks of approval of your work
* Wearing of white clothes and use of perfume at all times as if for a religious festival or festive occasion such as a wedding
* Sharing of fleeting life with one’s spouse: common experience of work and leisure as one’s lot from God
* Doing what is given to do wholeheartedly each day: enthusiasm, zest, gusto for work
* The opportunity for these four things only in this life
* **Seventh counsel in 11:7-10: *Light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. So even if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is but a breath. Rejoice, you young person, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you (do you good) in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes and know that for all these things God will bring you into judgement; remove vexation (disappointment) from your heart and banish trouble from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are but a breath.***
* Opening proverb: sunlight and its enjoyment
* Image for human life on earth
* Gift for all but enjoyment by some who experience its sweetness
* Seven final directives: one to mature person and six to young person
* Concluding advice for a mature person: problem of nostalgia
* Days of darkness = old age (12:2) and death (6:4)
* Daily rejoicing in passing blessings
* Concluding advice for a young person: youth as the most miserable time for many
* Rejoicing in the present rather than at a future date
* Positive attitude to life that comes from a cheerful heart
* Walking in the ways of the cheerful heart and the sight of the eyes: looking for what is given to enjoy in what is experienced
* Knowing God’s judgment for not enjoying what was given to enjoy
* Removal of vexation: the crippling anger and cynicism that comes from failure and disappointment
* Banishment of physical trouble by refusing to let vexation take over
* Reason: fleeting youthfulness with all its opportunities

1. **Conclusion**

* 1 Tim 6:6-8: ***Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.***
* 1 Tim 6:17: ***God… richly provides us with everything to enjoy.***