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Especially When He Is in Right Relationship with His Creator.

The Third argument - Life can be enjoyed rather than feared when one is in right relationship with God who gives life. 4:1 – 5:20 (Taken from my introduction to Ecclesiastes).

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot. [19] Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. [20] He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. Eccles. 5:18-20.¹

Actually, we are in the third argument against living life without the Lord Jesus Christ. The first two arguments were:

1. **The First argument** - Life apart from Christ is futile. However, man is to enjoy the goodness of life because God provides it. 1:1 – 2:26.
2. **The Second argument** - Life in general is composed of contradictory circumstances - both good and bad. These contradictions should point man towards God who is sovereign in their lives. 3:1 - 22.

Last week we covered the wonderful gift that God has given to every man - the ability to have friends. This gift along with many others God has given to the saved and unsaved alike. The difference between these two groups are that by design Christian friendship has the potential of transcending mere human emotional bonds. Christian friendship can be based on our common union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, the passionate apostle, wrote of this wonderful bond in terms of the human body and the interdependency that different body parts have on each other. Taken apart or disassembled the human body is a scene out of a horror movie. In its fully functional, *living* condition, the human body is represented as the wonderful relationship that each member of Christ's church has with each other.

So we have Paul's conclusion:

"while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, [25] so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. [26] If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. [27] Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." 1 Cor. 12:24-27.

¹ All passages are taken from NIV unless otherwise noted.

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Christian friendship can be a wonderful, vital, living relationship. Even taken in the context of the whole local church there should be a selflessness, compassion - indeed, a living, vital empathy for each other - even for those of us who might not have any special connection of friendship with another fellow member of the body of Christ. But I digress from today's topic.

God Gives to Men a Pleasant Occupation with Life.

He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. Eccles. 5:20.

Even with the emptiness of life without Christ God has given to both the saved and the unsaved alike the *capacity* to be occupied with the rewards of his life. I think we need to step back a little bit and understand that the whole of life in this sinful world is under the sovereignty of God including man's vocation, his personal wealth, his family - all of the things that men take for granted thinking that *they* earned their status of marriage, a stable job, interesting hobbies - the lot. The fact is that these all, including the capacity of man to enjoy life in general in spite of the emptiness of life apart from Christ comes from the hand of God. Paul alludes to this "gift," if you like, in his sermon on Mars hill:

". . . And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; [27] That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: [28] For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."
Acts 17:26-28, KJV.

I apologize for taking time on this idea that I have taught on before - but like Paul's sermon on Mars hill, Ecclesiastes 5:18 - 20 is a "big picture" passage. Just a couple of points from Paul's message if I may.

- God is the creator of mankind and has *never* abdicated His sovereignty over men or their affairs.
- It is the sovereign purpose of God that *all* men become rightly related to Himself - this is the core goal of the redemptive plan of God. The unsaved *choose* to remain in their sinful condemned state.²

² **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:17-18**

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- Every area of the life of man comes under the sovereignty of God - we the saved, and unsaved alike, "live, move and have our being" in Him (are under His sovereignty).
- Finally, the goodness that God showers on man must be taken in the light that he intends for man to repent of his sins and be saved. It is not a blank check for man to enjoy life and God's goodness *apart from* his responsibility to respond positively to the call of the Gospel - Romans 2:4.

So this preoccupation with the "good things of life" (which come from the hand of God) *is in itself* under God's sovereignty in that at some point in time He, God, intends that every man to not be in despair to the point that he resents a God who isn't concerned with him - rather *enjoys* life - even in its ultimate emptiness and at some time in every man's life the Gospel is going to be presented to him and he is afforded the opportunity to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. That is the big picture that we find in Ecclesiastes 5:20. Satisfaction in the good things of life is not an end in itself - rather it is a *safe environment* in which man is presented, without coercion, the opportunity to accept Christ or reject the Savior. True, there are times when God switches the events in life to that of tragedy to further emphasize man's responsibility to respond to the Gospel, - it is always in the light of the redemption of man in the case of the unsaved particularly. Tragedy in the life of the saved is another matter and is not the scope of today's lesson. Let's move on.

God Gives Men Satisfaction in Their Vocation.

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot. Eccles. 5:18.

The saved and unsaved alike are to find satisfaction in their job. Finding satisfaction is depicted here in the original using the Hebrew word, *ra-ah* - meaning, after inspecting and observing one's job, God places in the heart of men satisfaction in their occupation. This contentment, the sense of achievement is God-given and should be nurtured by all, especially by the Christian. There is no place in the life of a Christian for grouching about his job. Paul, himself, taught that we, as examples to the world, should be content in our occupations - even the worse possible occupation of slavery (remember, we must apply this principle within the context of biblical times - I'm not advocating slavery).

Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. [21] Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you--although if you can gain your freedom, do so. [22] For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. 1

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Cor. 7:20-22.³

Even the worse possible occupation of slavery was to be an occupation of achievement in Paul's time. And this was not a principle that was to be applied by believers alone for many slaves of Rome became successful tradesmen and eventually freedmen because they executed this God-given principle of finding satisfaction and achievement in one's occupation - even in the worse of conditions. Here's where it might rub us, as believers, the wrong way. Do we consider our job "the pits?" Are we constantly complaining about our jobs? Then either we need to take a serious look at our attitude towards our job - our boss or we need to find another occupation - it should be a serious matter of prayer for guidance. There is no place for a grouching believer in the workplace. God has given us the capacity to contemplate our job and to find ways to make it a rewarding occupation - let's take advantage of that capacity and bring honor to Him.

God Gives to Men Personal Wealth.

Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. Eccles 5:19.

Now, I'm not teaching a health and wealth gospel - fact is, that any prosperity that we have as men does come directly from His hand. That is the principle that is taught here - and this is a principle that applies to the saved and the unsaved alike. Wealth and possessions, not using a tangible dollars and cents criteria, are reflected in our Declaration of Independence as the pursuit of happiness - again, not the accumulation of a large fortune but the ability to live our lives in the context of personal freedom - free from the burden of overwhelming economic oppression - a concept that flies in the face of some horrible economic conditions of not a few nations that have reaped the results of ungodliness. That is not the norm for God's plan for men.

So the principle here is that whatever we have come from God's hand as a gift and that we should consider our personal wealth as a stewardship that should be carefully managed in order that we might derive God-given satisfaction and bring glory to Him. It should not be an end unto itself for that leads to frustration - this is the lessons from Ecclesiastes - Solomon's argument *against* living apart from right relationship with our Creator - the Lord.

Finally, I want to remind us all that the whole tone of Ecclesiastes can be one of gloom and doom unless we apply the correct perspective. Paul was certainly right we do "live, move and have our being" in Him.

³ Paul is using this segment from the workplace in his time to illustrate a principle in singleness versus marriage. That one should not be overly concerned that they are single.