

# Analysis of HVP Inheritance and How to Enjoy Life

📖 Ecclesiastes 2:18-26

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We are analyzing King Solomon's reflections on whether the grass really is greener on the other side of the fence, whether there really is something to human view point. To explore that this man decided to go negative volition to the word of God and just plunge into every area of life as deeply as he could, apart from God, and see for himself. Ecclesiastes is his report. This makes it one of the most interesting books in the entire canon of Scripture because it's a negative example, it's telling us how not to live. And the reason I think God the Spirit had this book included in the canon of Scripture is because we often think the same thing Solomon thought, we think the grass is greener on the other side, we think that unbelievers are having all the fun, but really there is nothing there. Once you repeat all the experiments Solomon tried all you find is vanity, just an emptiness.

We've been studying Solomon's report in Eccl 2, and how his first experiment was to dive headlong into pleasure. He found very quickly that that it was just raving lunacy and didn't accomplish a thing, so he modified that experiment to a moderated form of pleasure. He'd drink alcohol but not get drunk, he'd have all kinds of building projects and luxuries and women and song, but did it bring pleasure? No, in the end it too was all vanity. Now you'd think that was the end of the analysis but in 2:12 Solomon went further in his analysis. He wanted to squeeze out of the data as much information as he could. That's what he means by the words in 2:12 "I turned to consider." He means I changed the direction of my analysis. Here he's going to look at wisdom, human view point wisdom and compare it to folly, human view point folly, and see whether one has an advantage over the other. And the end of verse 12 says he's writing this because he's the king and who is going to come along and do more experimenting and thinking about this than him? No one. So this is pretty much the last time this experiment needs to be run. And we can take or leave the king's advice, but this is written so that we would not make the same stupid mistakes he made, that we'd actually learn from his negative example. In 2:13 he concludes that there is an advantage of human view point wisdom over folly and that advantage is as great as the advantage of light over darkness. In 2:14 he illustrates saying that the wise man at least looks at the world around him with eyes in his head, but the fool is just stumbling around. And so there is an advantage of human view point wisdom over folly. But the end of verse 14 clarifies the nature of the advantage. He says, "And yet I know that one fate befalls them both." Both of them are going to die. So human view point wisdom only

has relative advantage over folly. It does not have absolute advantage. It only has advantage for this life. In 2:15 Solomon applied this to himself saying, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" He wondered why he went to such lengths to gain human view point wisdom since the advantage it offered was not proportional to the effort. So he said to himself, "This too is vanity." In 2:16 he explained why "For there is no long time remembrance of the wise man as with the fool." Whether you are wise or a fool you will both be forgotten, and quickly. When the future generations come along they won't remember your extensive pains to gain wisdom. Alas, he says, he's lamenting in verse 16, "Alas, how the wise man and the fool alike die!" It is tragic that they share the same fate though they do not share the same efforts in life. 2:17 is the conclusion of a believer who spent a good portion of his life living by the flesh and it's the conclusion of an unbeliever who lives his whole life by the flesh. He says, "I hated life." I just hated it. Why? Because all the work done down here under the sun for all my selfish pursuits really does not give much of an advantage over just fooling around You sow in the wind; you reap the whirlwind, there's nothing there, no ultimate meaning, no ultimate fulfillment, no ultimate happiness, just hatred of life.

Now that's a very sad analysis, of course, but really, that is all that there will be for you if you are a believer and you decide to go negative to God. You will not find enjoyment. Every day will be a drag, and if every day is a drag it is because you are not putting God at the center of every activity, you are putting yourself and your own enjoyment at the center, but that will never work, that will always deprive you of enjoyment, so you have to recalibrate how to live, and how to put God at the center so that you can find enjoyment. And this is also a really sad analysis of an unbeliever, because this is where it all ends for him, I hate life. Life is just a worthless toil of worthless pursuits, tired and empty, and this should give us a heart for the lost, a heart to proclaim the gospel so they can be free of this deadly path.

Now today in 2:18 we come to further analysis. Solomon thought further. He's still not done analyzing. This man analyzed and analyzed and analyzed. He's already analyzed the advantage of wise living over folly and concluded that there is only a temporary advantage, but no ultimate advantage because both the wise man and the fool die. Now he wants to analyze what will happen to his inheritance when he dies, who will get his inheritance. So this section is about the inheritance you leave for your children and it is viewed by Solomon from the perspective of under the sun. So it's looking at it from the standpoint of the flesh. And if you live by the flesh then his concerns are valid, and there is a pessimism that results, but hopefully you will learn not to do this, because you are only destroying yourself and your children.

Solomon concluded verse 17 saying, "everything is futility and striving after the wind." In verse 18 he says, **Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun; for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.** He's considering what happens to all the wealth he labored for when he dies. He's not saying he **hated** all the labor **under the sun**, even though he said that was "grievous," but he's saying I hated all **the fruit of the labor**. This is the material wealth he had accumulated and did not spend. And he realizes, that

when you die, you can't take any of that material wealth with you. When you're still alive you can spend it for food, for water, for clothes, for cars, for houses, for land, and so forth and so on. But when you die that's it. If you didn't spend it, it's going to go to someone else. And Solomon is lamenting this.

And notice that Solomon says **my labor for which I had labored**. That expression is going to be used three times in these verses, and the point is to say that Solomon did not just **labor**, he labored very laboriously. He worked hard, long hours in order to accumulate his fortune. And now this just seemed to him to be a waste, because if he didn't spend it on himself then it would be left **to the man who would come after** him.

Now the man who would **come after** him is not just a general expression for a son, but the one who would occupy his throne, the scion to his office of king and successor to the throne of David. And the son is not named here, but we'll talk about him later. Solomon did not know at the time who he was, he is just speaking generally, but the prospect of passing it on to him caused Solomon to hate all the **fruit of his labor** that he had worked for **under the sun**.

In 2:19 the reason is stated. **For who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool**. Solomon did not know what kind of man would succeed his office and throne. And the reason he didn't know is because he hadn't spent enough time raising his children to know anything about them. Solomon was always involved in his pursuits, building his kingdom, building his empire, building his vast treasury. He didn't have time for all the kids he was making to know all their names, much less what they were like and whether they would be **wise** or **fools**. And so he had doubt about what kind of man would succeed him and that led him to hate the fruit of his labor. And the prospect that he might be **a fool** bothered him greatly, as it would all of us. And the reason this was so bothersome is because this son would **have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun**. You see, Solomon gained all this wealth by human view point wisdom, laboring according to the principles of this world system, apart from God, without respect to God. That's what he means by saying **under the sun**. It's just looking at life and living life from the human view point. And there is a human view point wisdom that is gained by listening to the world's experience and experiencing it yourself, but you see Solomon realized that all the wealth he accumulated from that wise labor would be under the **control** of someone else when he died. He didn't like not being in **control** of what he worked for. The word **control** means "free control," meaning the son could do whatever he wanted with all that money.

And the expression **labor for which I have labored** is repeated again to emphasize just how hard Solomon worked to gain his wealth. It was no light task. He worked long hours and he traveled extensively and he stayed on task. And now the prospect that all this wealth would come under the free control of an idiot was very difficult for think about. And it just so happened that the man who did succeed him was an idiot. This man's name was Rehoboam. He was the guy who when he came to the throne all the elders of Israel came to him requesting that he release the heavy burdens that Solomon had placed on them, such as the high taxes and slavery. Rehoboam took a few days to consult the wise men from Solomon's era and his fraternity brothers. The

wise men agreed that lowering taxes and getting rid of slavery would be beneficial for Rehoboam. The frat brothers disagreed and said raise the taxes and show them who's boss. Rehoboam went with the counsel of the frat boys and it just about caused a civil war. And if it had not been for the prophet coming in between the armies of the ten tribes and the armies of Rehoboam there would have been a war, but as it was God was gracious in allowing the division of the kingdom to occur peacefully. So Solomon's fears, that all the fruits of his labor might come into the free control of a fool, were fulfilled. And Solomon concluded with the words **This too is vanity.**

In 2:20 he says, **Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.** Notice that he repeats for a third time, the phrase, **my labor for which I had labored.** The point of this repetition is to emphasize to us that Solomon labored very hard, long hours to accumulate his vast treasure. But now he had no joy in the treasure, it didn't make him happy because of the prospect of passing it on to some fool. He says, **Therefore I completely despaired.** He literally lost all hope. He was in the pits of despair thinking about this. Unger said, "He fell into despair once again, since a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge, and skill has to hand over his possessions to one who has not worked for them (v. 18; 4:4)."<sup>1</sup> And notice that all this labor, he says, was done **under the sun**, so that we know that this was Solomon laboring without God at the center, without God in mind. Solomon just laboring for Solomon. Solomon just laboring to fulfill Solomon's aims and Solomon's goals. It was all about Solomon. And when you labor for you, and it's all about you and what you can acquire, this is the end of it. You're in despair because you've spent all these years working your tail off and neglecting your children and now there is the very likely prospect that they're going to turn out to be idiots, and now you are about to die and all that money is going to go to them and you know what they're going to do with it, they're going to spend it foolishly and there's not going to be one penny left and that says Solomon, led me to **complete despair.**

In 2:21 he somewhat repeats what he's been saying. **When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.** He didn't bring his children into the process of building this wealth. They stayed at home with the harem or something. So they didn't contribute to the work of building all the wealth, and one day you are just going to hand that legacy over, that big pile of wealth to them. You tell me how that's going to work out. And yet people keep doing it. They think that the kids are just going to be so happy and blessed to get all that money and it's going to motivate them to be hard workers and no it's not. That's a stupid way of thinking. Solomon says it's **a great evil.** The word **evil** in the Hebrew is *ra ah* and can be translated "injustice." It's a great injustice. Solomon is lamenting that someone gets everything for nothing. And he says, that's unfair! He's acting very selfishly right here. You can tell from verse 22.

**For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? What does he get? He gets** all this money, but what does he do? He sits around and worries about it. Worries about how to

protect it. Worries about how to control it after he's gone. Worries about how to write a will in such a way that he can exercise control over it after he's gone. That's what you get. You get a lot of worries. You're not able to enjoy it. You're just miserable. Is that fair? That's what Solomon is saying.

In 2:23, **Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.** So in the **days** you're out working hard, building capital, or trying to. This **task is painful**, he says, **painful** because you've got idiots working for you that blow it over here and blow it over there and they're wasting capital and slowing things down. And the whole thing is just **grievous**. It vexes you, it just causes grief, when all of it was supposed to bring wealth and joy. But it doesn't, all day long, every day is just a very **painful and grievous task**. Then you go home at the end of the day and you think it's all going to be better and now comes the **night**, he says, and your **mind does not rest**. All you can do is think about it. You can't sleep. You just lay there and think about your wealth and how you can protect it and where you can invest it and who is going to inherit all this? Someone who never had a sleepless night. Someone who was raised with a silver spoon, twenty dollar diapers, a brand new car on their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, and a check to pay for college and they never picked up a finger to do a thing and here you are handing them a fortune. What in the world do you think you're doing? You're ruining them. You're destroying them. That kid didn't experience what you experienced in verse 23. You didn't spend the time to bring them into the process. Verse 23 is your life, you're the one working your tail off day after day and at night your sleepless. And that's a miserable way to live life. But that's what you get for working hard under the sun. That's it. It's all vanity says the teacher, all vanity.

Now verses 24, 25 and 26 are Solomon's reflections after his first set of experiments later in life, after he repented. This is his reflection on 1:12-2:23 from the standpoint of divine view point wisdom. There will be six of these reflections as we work through the book. So what happened was Solomon gave us his analysis while he was living under the sun, apart from God, but toward the end of his life he repented, he changed his mind about trying to live life without God, he changed his mind about the grass being greener on the other side, he brought God back into the picture, he began to look at life correctly again, and so at the end of his experiments and analysis from the human view point, he ends by correcting that with the divine view point, and he begins that in verse 24, and his argument is that you can enjoy life, you just have to live it a certain way.

Verse 24, **There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.** This is it. **There is nothing better** than this. **for a man to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good.** Now he doesn't mean "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" That's fatalism. He means, because the world is the way it is, there's nothing better you can expect than to enjoy eating and drinking and finding enjoyment in your labor. You know, enjoy some of the fruits of your labor, eat and drink, don't gorge yourself and get drunk, just take some time over dinner to enjoy and relax, there's nothing better you can ask for. And **tell yourself that the labor** you are doing **is good**. I don't know what labor you are doing and you may hate it, but if you do it's because you're just living life under the

sun, you're living by the flesh. Solomon says you have to **tell** yourself that what you are accomplishing is **good**. The Hebrew says, "cause your soul to see good in your labor." It doesn't say it comes naturally. It says "cause your soul to see the good." That means you have to work at it. That means you have to look through all the mess and find the good. You know, so many things go wrong in our labor that it's hard to see through it all and find any good. And you get bogged down in the bad and you start to be just like Solomon in verse 17-18, you hate your life, you hate your job, you can barely function because you don't want to function and all you can do is think about how to escape. Now that is no way to live your life. Solomon says, and here he is absolutely correct, in a fallen world, yeah, there are troubles galore, but you have to cause your soul to see the good, you have to work at it, you have to find it and you have to dwell on it. There's nothing better than that. It's up to you now.

He says at the end of the verse. **This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.** This is the first mention of God in the book. He never used that before. And he's using it in the context of contentment in life; this relaxing and eating and drinking with others in enjoyment and telling yourself, hey, what we did today is good, that's from God. The rest of it, the frustration, the anger, the selfishness, that's not from God, that's from you, that's your flesh and Solomon's flesh and my flesh, that's us trying to get satisfaction apart from Him. But if you put God at the center, you find some relaxation and you meditate on the good that is coming out of your labor and that is from God.

In 2:25, **For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?** The rhetorical question requires a negative answer. No one can. God is the source of all enjoyment and if you don't put Him at the center, you can't eat and drink and have enjoyment. It's not possible. And Solomon would know. He just tried to in vv 1-23. He experimented with pleasure in as many ways as possible to have enjoyment apart from God, but he never could. He ended in complete despair, hating life, all was vanity. No one can eat and drink and have enjoyment without God at the center. Nobody. So don't think that you are going to do this experiment and be successful. You'll never be successful; you'll end up right where Solomon is. The most you can do is put God at the center, relax, look at what you've done and find the good, that's it.

In 2:26, **For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.** Now the **person who is good in His sight** is the one who walks in a way that pleases God. And the one who pleases God is one who puts God at the center of his ways. The one who does that God **gives wisdom and knowledge and joy**. Clearly the **wisdom** God gives is divine view point **wisdom** and the **knowledge** He gives is divine view point **knowledge** and all **joy** comes from Him. That is what God gives to the **person who** walks in a way that pleases Him. And that was Solomon in his earlier years. Solomon walked with the Lord and requested wisdom and God gave him wisdom and knowledge and joy.

But by contrast, **to the sinner He has given** this very laborious **task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight**. The **sinner** is the one who is not walking with God at the center of

his life. He has the very arduous task of working long hours to amass great wealth, and all for what? To possibly give it to someone who **is good in God's sight**. The point is he doesn't get to enjoy it. It's just an arduous task.

The final phrase of verse 26, **This too is vanity and striving after the wind**, refers to the task of the sinner. The trek in life that pursues wealth for pleasure may seem to hold out promise for joy and contentment, but there's nothing at the end, it's just as futile as chasing wind.

Warren Wiersbe said, "This completes the first section of Ecclesiastes—*The Problem Declared*. Solomon has presented four arguments that seem to prove that life is really not worth living: the monotony of life (1:4–11), the vanity of wisdom (1:12–18), the futility of wealth (2:1–11), and the certainty of death (2:12–23). His argument appears to be true *if you look at life "under the sun,"* that is, only from the human point of view.

But when you bring God into the picture, everything changes! (Note that God is not mentioned from 1:14 to 2:23.) Life and death, wisdom and wealth, are all in His hands; He wants us to enjoy His blessings and please His heart. If we rejoice in the gifts, but forget the Giver, then we are ungrateful idolaters."<sup>2</sup>

The point is clear, life can be enjoyed, but it depends on us having the right perspective on life. We have to look at things as they truly are, we live in a fallen world, we ourselves are fallen, but we can live beyond the fallen world when we learn to be content with the lot God has given us. That means being content with our spouse, our families, our location, our jobs, our homes, everything we have, and being able to relax and look at our work each day and look through all the mess and find the good. If we are doing that we will find all the enjoyment one can have in this life, for the enjoyment comes from Him, it's His gift, enjoyed when we have the right attitude and focus.

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1080.

<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 41–42.