

For wisdom fled from me to an infinite distance, and into a measureless deep, so that I could no longer get hold of it. Wherefore afterwards I abstained altogether from seeking it; and I no longer thought of considering the follies and the vain counsels of the impious, and their weary, distracted life. And being thus disposed, I was borne on to the things themselves; and being seized with a fatal passion, I knew woman— that she is like a snare or some such other object. For her heart ensnares those who pass her; and if she but join hand to hand, she holds one as securely as though she dragged him on bound with chains. And from her you can secure your deliverance only by finding a propitious and watchful superintendent in God; for he who is enslaved by sin cannot (otherwise) escape its grasp. Moreover, among all women I sought for the chastity proper to them, and I found it in none. And verily a person may find one man chaste among a thousand, but a woman never. And this above all things I observed, that men being made by God simple in mind, contract for themselves manifold reasonings and infinite questionings, and while professing to seek wisdom, waste their life in vain words.



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The Book of Ecclesiastes

*(The search for the ultimate maxim
to explain the nature of life).*



Chapter 7

The book of Ecclesiastes occupies a unique position in the Bible due to its prevalent sense of pessimism and absence of God's intervention in our world. In fact, the all-prevailing mood of a God remote from our human condition sets the tone for Ecclesiastes which seems incongruent with the other books of the Old Testament. It contains reflections, more philosophical in nature, rather than a testimony of belief, which we would normally associate with the Hebrew scriptural tradition. For the traditional author, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, God is the inscrutable originator of the world who determines the fate of humankind. Just as the natural is in constant movement minus the presence of real change, so the human expenditure of energy comes to nought, despite the fact that reason leaves us baffled, the author affirms that life is worth living with all its limitations. The following metaphor (literal) interpretation, on the chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes, are by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus, an early Father of the Church.

Chapter 7

For though a man should be by no means greatly advantaged by knowing all in this life that is destined to befall him according to his mind (let us suppose such a case), nevertheless with the officious activity of men he devises means for prying into and gaining an apparent acquaintance with the things that are to happen after a person's death. Moreover, a good name is more pleasant to the mind Proverbs 22:1 than oil to the body; and the end of life is better than the birth, and to mourn is more desirable than to revel, and to be with the sorrowing is better than to be with the drunken. For this is the fact, that he who comes to the end of life has no further care about alight around him. And discreet anger is to be preferred to laughter; for by the severe disposition of countenance the soul is kept upright. The souls of the wise, indeed, are sad and downcast, but those of fools are elated, and given loose to merriment.

And yet it is far more desirable to receive blame from one wise man, than to become a hearer of a whole chorus of worthless and miserable men in their songs. For the laughter of fools is like the crackling of many thorns burning in a fierce fire. This, too, is misery, yea the greatest of evils, namely oppression; for it intrigues against the souls of the wise, and attempts to ruin the noble way of life which the good pursue. Moreover, it is right to commend not the man who begins, but the man who finishes a speech; and what is moderate ought to approve itself to the mind, and not what is swollen and inflated. Again, one ought certainly to keep wrath in check, and not suffer himself to be carried rashly into anger, the slaves of which are fools. Moreover, they are in error who assert that a better manner of life was given to those before us, and they fail to see that wisdom is widely different from mere abundance of possessions, and that it is as much more lustrous than these, as silver shines more brightly than its shadow. For the life of man has its excellence not in the acquisition of perishable riches, but in wisdom. And who shall be able, tell me, to declare the providence of God, which is so great and so beneficent? Or who shall be able to recall the things which seem to have been passed by of God? And in the former days of my vanity I considered all things, *and saw* a righteous man continuing in his righteousness, and ceasing not from it until death, but even suffering injury by reason thereof, and a wicked man perishing with his wickedness. Moreover, it is proper that the righteous man should not seem to be so overmuch, nor exceedingly and above measure wise, that he may not, as in making some slip, *seem to sin* many times over. And be not audacious and precipitate, lest an untimely death surprise you. It is the greatest of all good to take hold of God, and by abiding in Him to sin in nothing. For to touch things undefiled with an impure hand is abomination. But he who in the fear of God submits himself, escapes all that is contrary. Wisdom avails more in the way of help than a band of the most powerful men in a city, and it often also pardons righteously those who fail in duty. For there is not one that stumbles not. Also it becomes you in no way to attend upon the words of the impious, that you may not become an ear-witness of words spoken against yourself, such as the foolish talk of a wicked servant, and being thus stung in heart, have recourse afterwards yourself to cursing in turn in many actions. And all these things have I known, having received wisdom from God, which afterwards I lost, and was no longer able to be the same.