

**The Three Paths Man Can Take Without Christ
Have the Same Tragic Result.**

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Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? [13] I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. Eccles. 2:12-13.¹

Solomon returns to the pursuit of wisdom as an end to itself. The two other choices are "madness and folly." What choices! Either we choose wisdom as Solomon did or we can choose folly and madness. In either case when death overtakes the end is the same: **"For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!** (Eccles. 2:16).

The Three Pathways a Man Can Take Without Christ.

The Lord has graced all men with minds - intellect. What men do with this gift is mostly up to them. Solomon continues with his dissertation about the futility of life without Christ and three ways a man can take in living his life:

- Wisdom - *heb. kokmah* = to be skillful, have wit, to be perceptive.
- Madness - *heb holela* from *halal* meaning to be irrational - insane.
- Folly - *heb siklut* = TWOT² says that the use in this passage suggests the unrestricted pursuit of pleasure and possessions. The "flavor" of the word folly is captured in ch 7:25b, 26 where the foolish man allows himself to be trapped by an immoral woman.

I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.
Eccles. 2:13.

Even without the Lord it is better to adopt the lifestyle of gaining wisdom than the two other categories mentioned here. But this pursuit without the Lord only brings temporary satisfaction. As mentioned in 1:8 there is an insatiability with the pursuit of empirical knowledge. I never tire of reading the National Geographic magazine of the fascinating topics of discovery. 2:14 says, in effect, that at least the man without Christ can "see" where he is going. The other two classes cannot and are prisoners of their way of life. Let me further say that 1:8 teaches another factor in this pursuit of a life without Christ - there is an insatiability about this pursuit. Yet without the satisfaction.

"Madness" in the original means to be completely irrational. Several examples come to mind including the criminal element in our society but I think of Hitler and Saddam Hussein, for example. They are in the same category as the criminal element they just have (had) different degrees of power and influence over others around them.

"Folly" is the element of society who go after the pleasures of life as an end in itself. The epicureans in Greek society and an example of this lifestyle. In 7:25 another Hebrew word is used to describe folly, (*heb kecel* = *the fat of the viscera* - *the fat foolish man who has spent a life of foolish pursuits*). Seeking pleasure is a self-destructive lifestyle.

¹ All passages are NIV unless otherwise noted.

² Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. II, pg 625, under *heb. siklut*.

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Today, we have a variation of the other facet of the lifestyle of folly in the materialism of today's world. Possessions are everything in some people's lives. I'm really getting tired of watching the 500 thousand to multimillion dollar home remodeling projects that are shown on the Home & Garden TV channel. It has almost become an art form to have one's home remodeled so that every amenity of life has been built in (I will, however, plead guilty to enjoying the off-the-wall "Extreme Homes" series).

So Solomon did have an advantage by being wise and seeking wisdom in the empirical sense. But we see the frustration in Solomon as he expresses it in verse 15, 16:

Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." [16] For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die! Eccles. 2:15-16

The poor foolish sinner who rejects Christ must face the same frustration near the end of his life also. As the writer of Hebrews said so well: **"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"** Hebrews 9:27, KJV. In the final analysis only the life that is lived for Christ will have meaning. It is only the godly who can face death confidently that his life will be measured by the standard of Christ, himself, and found not to be lacking.

The Legacy of the Fool Outside of Christ Versus the Godly in Christ.

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Eccles. 2:17

We have our two "catch phrases" here. Work that is done under the sun is the here and now. Chasing after the wind is life without Christ. The legacy of this man is truly a calamity. Yes, he has three paths that he can choose - seeking wisdom, madness (criminality, the irrational), or seeking folly - the pleasures of this life. But the end is the same. He must face the great judgement of God and give an account of his life and why he did not accept the wonderful gift of salvation from the hand of Christ.

The futility of investing in a lifetime without Christ is clear in the next verse:

I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. Eccles. 2:18 (read also verses 19 - 23)

Without Christ one's life is wasted on the pursuits of one's desires - which can be a noble pursuit, especially when wisdom, for example, a life devoted to the cure of disease, for example, but in the final analysis the legacy of one's life goes to the next generation - you literally "cannot take it with you." I think it is interesting that Solomon associated himself with the frustration of the sinner rather than the godly who pleased the Lord (see also 2:26). This is, of course, played out by the Lord's discipline of Solomon in 1 Kings 11 where Solomon was going to lose his empire because of his disobedience.

The importance of passing one's legacy into carefully prepared hands.

And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. Eccles. 2:19

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I'm confident that Solomon was thinking of his son Rehoboam here. As dramatically demonstrated later after Solomon's death, Rehoboam demonstrated foolishness in his decision to go with his "buddies" advise and to not correct the oppressive policies that his father employed in his pursuit for material gain, fame and opulence.³ This places an important responsibility on every mon and dad here (let's not forget the grandmoms and granddads either). I see these areas of concern for the parents:

- Be sure our children are pointed to the importance of Christ being Lord in their lives. This needs to be demonstrated on our own lives.⁴
- Be sure our children are trained in matters of excellence, honesty and doing things the right way.
- Be careful to "root out" trends toward the lifestyle of the irrational (the madness in our lesson) and the foolish pursuits of pleasure and materialism. Again, we must demonstrate this in our lifestyle.
- Can you think of any other issues that would apply here?

**We Are to Enjoy the Goodness That Comes from the Had of God
but must Be Careful to Seek to Please Him.**

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, [25] for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? [26] To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Eccles. 2:24-26

All of the good things of life come from God's hand - we are to enjoy his goodness. A clear and plain statement from God's word. Paul also expressed this thought:

1 Tim. 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Personal wealth - the accumulation of this world's goods is not intrinsically evil. It is clear from His word that He does distribute this world's goods so that He gets the glory when rich, godly men show generosity. The good Samaritan is an example of this. He could not have instructed the innkeeper to "charge it" to his account if he were not blessed with some wealth.⁵ Paul gives some light in the matter of diversity of material gain in II Corinthians 8:14. Paul addresses the inequality of wealth as an opportunity for giving in service to the Lord which results in equality in wealth. By wealth here I am not

³ I Kings 12:1 - 16.

⁴ Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. KJV

⁵ Luke 10:35.

referring to having a great abundance of money - millions of dollars - but to an adequate income that allows us to share with others who do not. Here's an important point: Paul wrote II Corinthians 8, 9 regarding a remarkable gift that the Macedonian church collected for the poor church at Jerusalem. Macedonia was not wealthy in terms of money. No. Macedonia had been victimized by several conquests - to the point that they were considered for special status by the Roman government for tax abatement. They did, however, have an abundance of generosity.⁶ God used their wealth of generosity to help the poor church in Jerusalem by taking up a collection that amazed Paul. Paul mentioned an interesting principle that I would like to call "[The Principal of Inequality of Wealth Being Corrected by Generosity.](#)" Here's how I think God intends generosity to work. Please turn with me to Deuteronomy 15 particularly verses 4, 7, 8 and 11. Regarding the poor in Israel God states to the Israelites who were materially blessed by Him:

- It was God's plan that there were to be no poor in Israel because He was going to be the source of their prosperity.
- However, there will be poor in the land for various reasons including disobedience to the Lord and those with means (wealth, meaning material blessing from the Lord) should adopt a generous attitude toward these people.
- This attitude is illustrated by the command not to be hardhearted and tightfisted. Rather, the Israelite is to be "openhanded" giving to the poor.

This whole section is very interesting because it deals with some dynamic, spiritual principles that I think are still in effect today. Here's what I think the principle is regarding those who are materially blessed versus those who are not. God will provide for his people through this inequality to equality principle by the generous attitude of the materially blessed so that even people who are poor will be provided for. This spiritual service is hinted at in Romans 12:6 - 8. Here, particularly in verse 8, Paul specified the spiritual gift of giving - not so much to the church coffers but **to the needy** "... if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously..."⁷ Can this be applied to the church economy? Yes, I think it can. This is certainly God's way. Not some legalistic way where the poor must contribute a fixed amount to the church to fulfill some "spiritual duty" of giving.

So personal wealth should be used in such a way that it is an opportunity for service to the Lord. Psalm 112 describes the man who is blessed by the Lord in wealth. Verse 9 says that he disperses his wealth abroad to the poor.⁸ In the final analysis the wealth that we might have is not our but is His and we are stewards of it. Yes, we are to enjoy the good that the Lord gives us but, more importantly, part of God's economy in the Christian community is that we are to be generous with the wealth that He gives us so that those who are in need are blessed by Him through us as we serve Him in whole-hearted service (read Romans 12:1, 2, 8 and the context).

⁶ Read II Corinthians 8:2.

⁷ Romans 12:8b.

⁸ Psalm 112:9 He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor. Also quoted in II Cor. 9:9.