

As the book now winds to its conclusion, this chapter offers encouragement. “Life under the sun” has been thoroughly explored and the conclusions of that exploration clearly set forth in the previous chapters. What practical use should a young man/woman make of them? Where should all the sobering conclusions of the previous chapters lead them in their attitude and demeanor? Should all the joy and anticipation to live their “life under the sun” now be quenched? Does God’s curse of His material creation which resulted from the sin of Adam and Eve preclude His faithful children from trying to enjoy it and conquer its challenges? How does God want godly and devout young people to look at their lives which they will live “under the sun?” Koheleth will now address these issues.

The first six verses are a mixture of optimism and promise on the one hand and realism and uncertainty on the other. “Life under the sun” cannot be understood, predicted or managed. It can only be lived and navigated each day with the understanding that nothing of the future can be known. Though the future is uncertain, God wants us to rise to all challenges and seek for dominion. He wants us to be optimistic, to trust Him, and to live each day in His providential care. He makes one thing very clear in this chapter. God wants us to live our life “under the sun” to the fullest possible extent. He wants us to enjoy what can be enjoyed, and to serve and honor Him through it all.

The first two verses offer an exhortation. Though the future is uncertain, God wants us to make good use of our financial abilities. He does not want us to hoard in fear of the future. He wants us to cast our bread upon the waters even though we know the water will take it far from us. His promise is that we will find it again. This has led some to conclude that He is speaking of acts of benevolence and charity, while others see in it only the financial industriousness that is so often rewarded. I believe that a third possibility takes in both. God has many words of wisdom in the Scriptures regarding the use of our time, talents, finances, etc. Many of them take faith in God for in reality we are simply throwing our bread on the waters. God’s promise is that when in our trust of Him we trust necessary risks, we will find it after many days. For He “will never fail or forsake” us.

The next two passages(:3-4) speak of the full clouds pouring forth either a blessing or curse upon the earth depending upon when and how much rain they bring. While the falling tree also brings a blessing or curse depending upon when and which way it falls. None of these things can be predicted or controlled. Yet those who become overly cautious as a result of possible harm will lose out on great blessings.

This follows with a general exhortation(:5-6). God freely admits that there is uncertainty to “life under the sun.” There are so many things we do not know. This is why He wants us to bring optimism into the calculated risks that must be taken in life.

All this advice is given with the basic understanding that this part of one’s life is limited. The time for such optimism is finite, and once gone is gone forever. In all the dealings that young men and women have under the sun, one thing must never be lost sight of, the days of darkness are coming(:7-8). He will explain these days in greater detail in 12:1-5. These are the days when our physical bodies begin to decay and the use of the five senses and useful functioning of our muscles, minds, and other bodily organs begin to fail. When we begin to lose our sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, the days of darkness begin. They begin slowly, but continue their downward spiral until they end in death. The autumn and winter of our lives will contain many days. Days of pain and sorrow, of remembrances of former days and times when people who no longer live were our friends.

Before moving into the details of these dark days, God offers a final exhortation to the young(9-10). Rejoice in your youth! Enjoy and use well those days. Do the thing you like to do. But never forget one thing. You will stand before God in judgment, and when that day arrives, you will need to be properly prepared. Therefore, all the things you want to do must be done with the realization of God’s limitations of right and wrong and good and evil.

Eleven

1. Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days.

The break between the last verse of the tenth chapter and this verse appears to be a complete one. Although 10:18 may have some bearing on it. The poetic symbolism must therefore be understood based only on the context of

the two verses, and an understanding that the goal of the entire book was that of exploring “life under the sun.” Of the eight commentaries consulted, three (Keil-Delitzsch, Kidner, Kidwell-Dewelt) express the opinion that Koheleth is stressing the importance of industrious effort. Though life is uncertain, young people must be bold and work hard if they want to be successful “under the sun.”

“... the exact meaning of both verses is much contested. It is highly improbable that the actual meaning and application can be made with any certainty. No less than six distinct explanations have been offered by commentators. Some are so fanciful that they do not merit consideration. The two views which are most generally held are: (1) the traditional Jewish view holds that the lesson is one of charity, and that one’s benevolence should be practiced freely without a view to personal return. ... (2) The other interpretation encourages the daily pursuit of labor, resigning oneself to the providence of God’s certain control and promise of future reward.” Kidwell-Dewelt, *Ecc.* p 262-263)

... the interpretation of 11:1, which proceeds in two fundamentally different directions, the one finding therein recommended unscrupulous beneficence, the other an unscrupulous spirit of enterprise. We decided in favour of the latter: it is a call, derived from commercial pursuits, to engage in fresh enterprise. (Keil-Delitzsch, Vol 6 p. 391)

The other five take the “traditional Jewish view” of charity and benevolence. The most practical and simple approach is found in the realization that both of these things are clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. That being the case, it is no longer a question of whether something is scriptural or not, only of trying to determine exactly what is being stressed. Sometimes a vagueness in expression that leads to two different scriptural views is simply a means by which both can be understood.

That God wants us to be diligent in life is dealt with many times both in this book and elsewhere. At the very beginning, God made it clear that this is why He created man. Both before and after the curse, it was God’s intent that man be industrious and work hard to take dominion.

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Gen 1:28

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. Gen 2:15

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Gen 3:19

It is a part of giving God the glory that we do these things. Koheleth was not seeking to take this zeal and intense desire to succeed away from us. In spite of the “vanity of vanities” of life “under the sun,” this attitude must remain intact:

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. Ecc 9:10

At no time does God ever authorize man to take a pessimistic, what is the use attitude. He wants us to work hard! He wants us to approach life with zeal, and the determination to succeed. It is wrong to use the uncertainties of life to justify sloth and laziness.

Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks. Ecc 10:18

Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, 7 Which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, 8 Provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. 9 How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? 10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep-- 11 So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man. Prov 6:6-11

That this may be all that God is telling us here is certainly a strong possibility. The investments one makes in doing the things God created us to do will always bring a great return. When we listen to God and strive for the things He has given to make us happy with all our hearts, we will find that we will always get a great return. God has asked us to be fruitful and multiply, to take dominion over the earth. Those who spend their lives for their families, and in quests to take dominion over God’s creation find great joy and fulfillment. It is truly a life worth living. When we add to this doing things with all our might, and with diligence and effort, after many days we will find the greatest of all returns for our investment.

This brings us to the traditional Jewish view that this is speaking of benevolence and kindness of charity and deeds of mercy. This view holds that those who invest their time, money and effort in such activities will find a great return for their investment after many days. What makes this view so plausible are the multitudes of Scriptures that teach it. God has always wanted man to love his neighbor as himself, and especially those

neighbors who are in need.

“If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, 8 “but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. 9 “lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you. 10 “You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. 11 “For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’ Deut. 15:7-11

The obvious and clear promise here is that by giving to your needy brother, even under circumstances where you know he will never be able to pay you back, God will bring about things in your life that will more than repay you for what you lost in helping that person. God can increase our possessions in multitudes of ways. He can keep the evil things that time and chance would have brought to us from happening. He can bring about changes in weather that will lead to a bountiful harvest that would not otherwise have happened. He can providentially do any number of things that will cause us to find what we have “lost” a hundredfold. Any time we invest in the things God has told us to do, especially when it forces us to lose things we had hoped we might have had, when we look back many days later, such investments will never leave us poorer. They will always leave us richer.

1. Cast your bread upon the waters,

The term “cast” is the pivotal point upon which our understanding of the verse rests. It is used to describe the act of “*sending*” or it can mean to “*get rid of*” something.

shalach 7971, “to send, stretch forth, get rid of.”... It occurs in all periods of Hebrew and in the Bible about 850 times... Basically this verb means “to send,” in the sense of (1) to initiate and to see that such movement occurs or (2) to successfully conclude such an action. ...The most frequent use of shalach suggests the sending of someone or something as a messenger to a particular place:... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

The term “cast” therefore gives rise to a dual idea. “Throw your bread away” upon the waters or “send forth” your bread upon the waters. When it comes to acts of benevolence, there are those who see it as simply throwing away something valuable. There is little chance of getting any return on this type of investment. While others who heed God, see it as the best type of investment. One that brings a sure return. Though some translators want this to be unleavened bread that will float, a careful review of the definition of this term reveals that such a view is possible but not probable. Since it can refer not only to all types of bread, but also to “*meal,*” or even “*food in general.*”

lechem 3899, “bread; meal; food; fruit.” Lechem occurs about 297 times and at every period of biblical Hebrew... This noun refers to “bread,” as distinguished from meat... “Bread” was baked in loaves: Lechem can represent food in general. In Gen. 3:19 (the first biblical occurrence), it signifies the entire diet: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread...” This nuance may include meat, as it does in Judg. 13:15-16: “And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread...” In 1 Sam. 14:24, 28, lechem includes honey, and in Prov. 27:27 goat’s milk...” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

But even unleavened bread will not float on the water for long. Whether it be the thin wafers of unleavened bread, a loaf of leavened bread, or any other type of food, the time frame for someone gaining any benefit from it is very small. Even in a fast flowing stream someone would have to find it within a few hundred yards. Hence the nature of this proverb is that from the human perspective, there is little likelihood of such casting of any type of bread upon any water doing much good. While this seems to be a good proverb for the types of risks that young people take in successful ventures, it seems a stretch to understand it as charitable deeds. Why then does the “traditional Jewish view” see this as deeds of charity. When it is compared with other proverbs written by Solomon at about the same time, the reason becomes clearer.

There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than it right, But it leads to poverty. Pr. 11:24-25

There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches. Pr. 13:7

He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, And He will pay back what he has given. Pr. 19:17

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard. Pr. 21:13

He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor. Pr. 22:9

He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses. Pr. 28:27

All these verses contain the idea of giving to the poor, and each of them in one way or another offers a small piece of what is spoken here in Ecclesiastes 11:1-2. Jesus expresses a similar idea:

Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Lk. 14:12-14

This verse expresses very clearly that there are two types of investments that can be made when doing deeds of kindness. There are those that will be repaid by man and those that will be repaid by God. Though both require faith, there are some who look at things as Jesus expresses in verse 12. They invite only those who can and will repay them. They put their trust in men to repay their kindness with kindness. He wants more of His disciples. He wants them to invite those who are a poor investment from man's view. Those who are unable to repay them. In this way, they are investing in things that God will repay them for. From man's viewpoint they are simply throwing it all away. Those nights reserved for people who can never repay will have no return whatsoever. How can they? Those people are not important. They cannot help us with business investments, they can't even invite us back for a good time. The difference though is seen through the eyes of faith. We have just placed an investment in God's hands. We have put it into the heavenly account. There it will accrue, and though man might think we just threw it out onto the waters, God promises we will find it again after many days.

When one does charitable deeds to people who are in such dire need that there is no way for them to repay them, it is like throwing bread upon the water. It sinks in the depths, and even if you could get it back it would not be worth it to do so. But with God's promises, all that changes. This is certainly how all charitable deeds ought to be viewed by God's people. It is the only sure investment in the future that we have. Even if we die before we find it again here, we will still find it again! Everything we give in this manner will be found again. It is therefore the very best possible use of our money.

"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Lk 16:9-13

Hence casting our bread out onto the waters by "throwing it away" on those who cannot repay us is "making friends for ourselves." There is therefore no question or doubt about it. No matter what tomorrow brings, we will find it again!

For you will find it after many days.

Though it has long ago sunk into the waters, we will find it again. Through both intentional and unintentional searches, it just keeps coming back to us.

matsa' 4672, "to find, meet, get." ... It is attested both in biblical (about 455 times) and post-biblical Hebrew... Matsa' refers to "finding" someone or something that is lost or misplaced, or "finding" where it is. The thing may be found as the result of a purposeful search, ... On other occasions, the location of something or someone may be found without an intentional search... Matsa' may connote not only "finding" a subject in a location, but "finding something" in an abstract sense. This idea is demonstrated clearly by Gen. 6:8: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." ... Matsa' can also mean "to discover." God told Abraham: "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes" Gen. 18:26. ... (Vines)

God is able to take the things we "cast away" in faith and submission to Him, and bring them back to us again. He can do this through providence in this life. He can help us become wealthy, or make all that we do abound. He watches our use of money, He watches how we discharge our responsibilities. Those who cast their bread upon the waters are sowing a great seed.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, II Cor. 9:6-10

2. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight,

Like the previous verse, this passage also has enough latitude to fit more than one possible interpretation. The term “give” is used over 2000 times in the Scriptures. It generally speaks of things that are given, entrusted, or committed.

5414 nathan (naw-than') to give; to lay, set, place; to make, to do, the varied use of this word may be classed under these significations. I. To give, ... to give in the hand of anyone... to entrust, commit... under this head it bears the sense, to grant, to give forth, ... II To set, place... used for planting, fixing, & c. III to make to do; .. cause to be...” Wilson p. 186-188

Koheleth is exhorting us to give, entrust or commit a “serving.” We are to take this serving and entrust it to another. We must therefore determine who this is to be entrusted to, and what it is that is to be served. The term “serve” is generally used to describe a portion or a share that one is given or has in something.

2506 cheleq- 1) a portion, a share, a part, territory ... b) a portion, a tract, a parcel (of land) c) one's portion, one's possession ...” (BDB)

God is therefore asking those who are young to recognize their responsibility to give, entrust or commit a portion or share to another. As noted in the previous verse, the most likely possibility is that this refers to the opportunities that present themselves for us to help those in need. When we see people in need, we should give or entrust what they need.

The terms “seven” and “eight” seem to indicate completeness and beyond. God has often used seven as the number of completeness. To give up to completeness would be to give right up to the point of God's expectations. To go beyond that means that we are doing it with cheerfulness and a true desire to be helpful. It is the going the second mile and the turning of the other cheek. Jesus spoke in a similar manner when He answered Peter's question if giving forgiveness must be done up to completeness. Peter wanted to give up to seven (completeness), Jesus said that seventy times seven was more in keeping with God's desires (Mt 18:21-22).

We must be prepared to go to the limit and continue to be cheerful about it in the realm of kindness and benevolence. No opportunity to help another should be passed up.

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Gal. 6:9-10

He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses. Pr. 28:27

For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

This is the reason for the above exhortations. The most obvious interpretation is that we must help others while we have the opportunity because we do not know when evil afflictions will strike us and not only will we no longer be able to help, but may actually find ourselves in need. That we do not know what will be “under the sun” has been stressed many times in this book. There is a time for everything under the sun, and we do not know when one time will end and another begin. A time of prosperity can be followed by a time of adversity (a time to gain/a time to lose; a time of peace/a time of war). We simply must put ourselves into the position where the Lord sees us favorably.

Blessed is he who considers the poor; The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble Ps. 41:1

He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, And He will pay back what he has given. Pr. 19:17

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard. Pr. 21:13

Each of these states the same thing. Since one does not know when his own days of evil might come when he too will be in dire straits, it is wise for him to make use of unrighteous mammon to make friends so that when evil days come, he will have many friends to lend a hand.

3. If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth;

These two proverbs reveal a clear and powerful truth. We may not know why, but when clouds appear full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth. This is generally a blessing, but not always. It can be a curse depending on the time of year and circumstances of those in their path.

As snow in summer and rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool. Prov 26:1

If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, I then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Lev. 26:3-4

Most of the time clouds filled with rain are a great blessing. We rejoice to see them come, but there can be times when we do not want rain, but when the clouds come, we cannot stop it. When the land is already saturated with water and another heavy rain comes in we see flooding, ruin, and loss of life. Rain can be a great blessing and a great curse. But blessing or curse, when the clouds are full, they empty themselves. This is a fixed reality of life and sits in the same company with the fixed realities of time listed in Ecclesiastes 3:1- 8. Since we have no control over such things, the possibility of great blessing or great catastrophe is always just over the horizon.

And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, There it shall lie.

This is exactly the same lesson. The falling of a tree can be a great catastrophe depending upon the type of tree and when, where, and which way it falls. It might just miss the house or a person, and we marvel at the blessing we have been given because it missed. Sometimes a tree falls on a person or a home, and destroys or kills. When such an event occurs it is a terrible tragedy. At other times we have a prized fruit tree, or a wonderful shade tree that can also fall. All trees begin to weaken at some point in their existence. Even if we miss all the signs of it, when the wind pushes a weakened tree, it is going to fall in whatever direction it falls. It may be to the south or it may be to the north, but wherever it falls, that is where it will lie. This may be a blessing, a curse, or it may be of no consequence. Regardless of the outcome, these two events come with no means of knowing when they will come, or of stopping them if they do. We also have no way of knowing whether such events will bring a blessing, a curse or nothing at all. This is not a new thought in the book. It is only a specific application of a principle set forth earlier regarding time and chance.

I returned and saw under the sun that-- The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. Ecc. 9:11

When the clouds come full of rain, it is simply time and chance happening to all. If time and chance bring rain at a most inconvenient moment, then you are going to be ruined or destroyed, and there is nothing you can do about it. If time and chance bring rain at just the right pivotal moment, then you are going to be greatly blessed. This is also true of a tree. If the falling of the tree to the south will ruin you or make you rich, then when it falls you will either be ruined or made rich. Either of these outcomes can occur. They are a part of “life under the sun” and “time and chance.” They come without warning when they come and nothing we can do will bring or prevent them.

4. He who observes the wind will not sow,

With the above in mind, one is placed somewhat in a quandary. Sometimes all the provisions made for the future are so placed that it is the greatest thing that could ever happen, other times it is the worst. Yet one danger must be avoided at all costs. No one can allow themselves to become so paralyzed with the possibilities for loss, that they stop working altogether. Once this occurs the loss is assured. The term “observe” is used in the sense of “tending,” “taking care of,” “watching over,” or “giving attention to.”

shamar 8104, “to keep, tend, watch over, retain.” ... Shamar means “to keep” in the sense of “tending” and taking care of. ... The word also means “to keep” in the sense of “watching over” or giving attention to. ...” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

A strong windy day will obviously have a negative affect on a crop. Those who are so worried about the wind that they try to watch over and give attention to it are not going to sow. Every small breeze can turn into a gale. The calmness of the morning might lead to a blustery afternoon or evening. There will always be a possibility for a strong wind to arise before the seed has the chance to take root. If one is so worried about the wind that they do not sow, then the outcome will be even worse than if the wind did arise.

And he who regards the clouds will not reap.

This phrase views it at the other end. The man has done all he can to secure a good harvest. He has plowed, sown, and watched the crops grow to the time where they need to be reaped. When the time for harvest comes, those who regard the clouds and do not want to harvest under the threat of rain which may ruin the crops before they can be stored, also place themselves into the position of ruin. They do not reap, and the harvest passes with the crops rotting in the fields due to the fearful nature of the owner. It is not wise to “to inspect” “consider” “regard” try to “learn about” or “give attention” to it.

7200 ra'ah- to see, to look at, to inspect, to perceive, to consider... 1) to see 2) to see, to perceive ... 4) to look at, to see, to regard, to look after, to see after, to learn about, to observe, to watch, to look upon, to look out, to find out 5) to see, to observe, to consider, to look at, to give attention to, to discern, to distinguish ... (BDB)

What is the point to these two statements? Is he only concerned about farmers and farming? Is there a larger and broader application to all this? When adversities come which make the return less than it might have been under other circumstances, still one must make the very best out of what they have at the moment. This is true not only of farmers, but of every other area of life. There are those who will not marry until they have enough to live on, those who will not have children until they have a home to raise them in, those who will not take any risks at all because of a fear of failure. Certainly these will not fail at anything, but they will never succeed either. God does not want us paying so much attention to the possible down sides to things that we never do anything. Sometimes it take just as much faith to do something as it does not refrain from doing something. We must all seek for the wisdom to know the difference.

Anything undertaken in life will be a risk, and only those who trust in God's providential care, have any hope of enjoying life and succeeding in the things they have the opportunity to attempt.

5. As you do not know what is the way of the wind,

No one knows the way of the wind. They can chart it, they can track the tropical storms that it creates, they can track the tornados that it spawns, they can correlate heat and cold, but they cannot tell you where it will come from next, or what conditions will occur that will bring it about. No one knows this. Again, this is a truth that even all our computer technology and ingenuity has not been able to change. No one knows the way of the wind. This too can bring great blessings or serious problems, yet man cannot control over it. Jesus used this same point to help Nicodemus see an important spiritual truth.

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:8

Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child,

This too is beyond man's technology or knowledge. We can watch it and see it occur, we can say that it is a multiplication of cells, but we do not know how God placed all this information into the male sperm and female egg. Nor do we understand how it occurs, only that it does.

So you do not know the works of God who makes all things.

This reasoning is very similar to that found in Job 38-41. Through a series of questions, God proved to Job that he knew so little about the workings of the universe that he was in no position to question or pass judgement upon God or His works. This appears to be the case here as well. We are literally surrounded by a great multitude of things we do not understand and have no control over. Things that hold powerful control over our lives and destiny. Koheleth only brings up these two to illustrate how little we understand about the works of God. We find uses for the wind though we do not understand it. We have children though we cannot understand how they are formed in the womb. We do this with all of God's works. We use oil, natural gas, electricity the atom. We do not fully understand it, but we make what use we can of them. There are millions of things that man cannot know or understand.

What application shall be made of this? Shall we cower in fear of the powerful forces God has created all around us or shall we use them to the best of our ability? Shall we live in fear of the terrible consequences that each use of God's works we makes could bring or shall we seek to use them to our betterment? Even more to the point, shall we use them with no care or concern for the One who created and set them into motion, or shall we give Him the glory, honor and trust by carefully listening and obeying Him while at the same time praising and adoring Him?

6. In the morning sow your seed,

Though life is filled with infinite complexities over which we have no control, God wants us to approach it with zeal and optimism.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. Ecc 9:10

In the morning, before you know how the day will go, whether there will be wind, clouds, rain etc. sow your seed. The term morning actually refers to the specific moment when the darkness ends and the first light begins to dawn. This stresses the need to move as soon as we have made the decision.

boqer 1242, “morning.” This word occurs about 214 times and in every period of biblical Hebrew. This word means “morning,” though not the period of time before noon. Rather it indicates the point of time at which night is changing to day or that time at the end of night:(Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

Again, this is not limited to farming, it applies to every realm of our lives. God wants us to approach each thing with optimism and a zeal to do it with all our might. When you face each new challenge we must weigh things out in the balance of God’s word, make the best choices we can and then get on with it. We must choose our career, wife, children, home, etc with this in mind. Make the best possible assessments and decisions, then sow the seed. Indecision and worry always leads to failure. Weigh it out with the wisdom God offers in His word, make the best possible decisions you can, pray about it, then sow!

And in the evening do not withhold your hand;

Two possible interpretations offer themselves. He may be continuing the thought of verse four of sowing and reaping. In the morning of our lives we do all our sowing and beginning. While in the evening of our lives we must do all our reaping and in neither should we be afraid. When it is time to sow in our youth, sow with boldness, trust, and submission to God. When the evening of our lives come, and we reap the harvests of all the sowing done in our youth, we must continue to work and make the most of what is brought. Though this could be all that he is saying, there is another possibility.

He may also be saying that when we begin our sowing in the morning, we must carry through to the evening. Begin your sowing(whatever it is) in the morning and do not withhold your hand from it even in the evening. The term evening, like morning refers to the specific moment where the daylight ends and the darkness begins.

`ereb 6153, “evening, night.” The noun `ereb appears about 130 times and in all periods. This word represents the time of the day immediately preceding and following the setting of the sun. (Vine’s)

Work for the fulness of the day. This would stress that from the very moment that we put our hand to the plow, we never look back. We work hard to make the things we have committed to in the daylight hours of our lives work out.

For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.

It is obvious from this verse that theme for youth is cautious optimism. Though “life under the sun” is vanity and will end in fruitless meaningless emptiness, we are to take up it’s challenge for all it is worth. Though we will leave this world as we entered it, God wants us to enjoy and grow from its challenges. To learn from failures and to glory in the successes. God freely admits to all that there are many pitfalls and difficulties to life, and death is lurking around every corner and will leap upon us at a moment when we were not thinking it would come. There is a time for every purpose under heaven, and we have little dominion over the powerful forces that lead to success or failure. But God still wants us to try. He wants us to work hard in all areas of life because we simply do not know which ones will prosper, and those which do will help us to forget the bitterness of those that did not.

The term “prosper” speaks of things that “*succeed*” or “*please*” us. Things that we look back on as being “*advantageous*” or bringing “*success*”

3787 kasher- to succeed, to please, to be suitable, to be proper, to be advantageous, to be right and proper to ... b) (Hiphil) to give success

Some things are going to succeed! These are the things that give us pleasant memories and bring wonderful benefits to our lives. None of the things revealed in this book lead to pessimism! No one should conclude that since life cannot be beaten, there is no point to trying. No faithful servant of God sees it like this. With God’s providential care, and a full trust in living “life under the sun” with the wisdom God gives in His word, the Spirit here reveals that God’s people ought to accept all the challenges life brings and relish the opportunity to win as often as possible.

Not all things will succeed, but neither will all things fail, and no matter what occurs, one can still find joy and

contentment in life in whatever state they are in if they expect and take from life what God intended. Enjoy your wife, enjoy your work, enjoy your food and drink. A poor man who has had failures can enjoy it as much as the wealthy who has had many successes. Yet with each day, no one really knows whether it will bring success or failure. Hence the uncertainty of life should be viewed with cautious optimism and excited anticipation. Sometimes everything will work out well. The New Testament sheds much additional light on this subject. God does not remove any of this, He only asks that we channel our best efforts into the kingdom, and that He will take care of the things spoken of here.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 “but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Mt 6:19-21

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Mt 6:33-34

Those who lay up treasures in heaven are simply carrying this verse to its final conclusion.

7. Truly the light is sweet, And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; 8. But if a man lives many years And rejoices in them all, Yet let him remember the days of darkness For they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.

Verses seven and eight must be interpreted as a unit. There is a contrast made between the light and the darkness that helps us grasp what he is seeking to convey to the minds of youth. The term “light” generally refers to the light of the sun, moon, and stars, or to the artificial light of a lamp that chases away the darkness of night. But many times it is also used to contrast that which is wonderful, beautiful, right or good with that which is evil sad, or filled with sorrow.

or 216, “light.” This noun appears about 120 times and is clearly a poetic term. The first occurrence of ‘or is in the Creation account: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” Gen. 1:3. Here “light” is the opposite of “darkness.” The opposition of “light” and “darkness” is not a unique phenomenon. It occurs frequently as a literary device: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” Isa. 5:20; ... In Hebrew various antonyms of ‘or are used in parallel constructions: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” Isa. 9:2. The basic meaning of ‘or is “daylight” (cf. Gen. 1:3) ... In the metaphorical use ‘or signifies life over against death: “For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” Ps. 56:13. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

2822 choshek (kho-shek’); from 2821; the dark; hence (literally) darkness; figuratively, misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness: (Strongs)

7. Truly the light is sweet, And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;

There can be no gainsaying this statement. It is true under all circumstances and in all situations. There really is nothing evil that one can say about light. It is sweet, pleasant in every way. It brings joy, happiness and contentment to the heart. It helps one see clearly and brings such beautiful things to the eye. It is such a pleasure to enjoy the sun and all that the sun brings to our view.

Yet as noted above, it is set into its context by carefully pondering it with verse eight. The contrast between light and darkness centers here on “the days of darkness” that “will be many.” There can be little doubt that the days of darkness are those referred to in 12:1-7. The days of old age when the body begins its gradual decay into dust. The days when we lose hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch. The days when we lose strength and begin to feel fears we have not known before. The days when we begin to look death in the eye and know there is no escape. Though we live for many years in the sweetness of the light, the days of darkness are waiting for us.

He is therefore counseling the youth to rejoice in the light. It is sweet and pleasant to the taste. When one is young, they have their strength and vitality, they have optimism and idealism, they are excited with all the prospects of life. Truly youth is a time when all is light and joy and pleasantness.

When all is said and done, in spite of the uncertainty of the future. In spite of all the damage done by the curse to this world, it is still a worthy place for the children of God to live and grow. The world God created is a beautiful place to live. Light brings so many beautiful things to our consciousness. It is a sweet and wonderful thing. Our days under the sun enjoying our work and its fruits, our family and our meals should never be lightly

esteemed. We should praise and adore God for all these things. Our praise to God will certainly be more intense and filled with greater emotional power when our hearts are filled with the joy and wonder of the sweet pleasantness of what can still be enjoyed.

This does not negate all that the book has brought to light. It only softens and qualifies it. There will be sorrows, heartaches and problems, which will work for the good of those who love God (Rom 8:28). We will count them all joy knowing they will bring strength and patience to us (Rom 5:3-4; James 1:3-5). But between such times there will also be great delights. Times of great joy and gladness. Life is pleasant, it should be made use of in the best possible way by God's people.

8. But if a man lives many years And rejoices in them all,

Koheleth now selects the best case scenario that "life under the sun" can offer. He offers up the individual who is allowed to live many years, and who is given the additional benefit of rejoicing in every one of them. He has a good life. He enjoys all the things that life can bring. He finds a

virtuous wife whose worth is far above rubies. (Prov 31:10). His quiver is full of the children of his youth (Ps 127:4-5). He has been blessed in all that his hand finds to do. His life has been full and rich as he has enjoyed the light. None of this is impossible. Many have found their lives to flow just exactly like this. But though from birth to the present moment this be the case, there is another reality to be reckoned with. Most first saw this in the grand parents who were strong in our youth and then began to weaken and die in our early adulthood. This is again repeated by our own parents as we grow to middle age ourselves. Then suddenly and with little warning it breaks upon us:

Yet let him remember the days of darkness For they will be many.

The term "remember" conveys the idea of being able to "*call to mind*" or "*bear it in mind.*"

"To remember, to recollect, to call to mind; mostly with an accusative, ... to bear it in mind, either to his advantage or his disadvantage... It connotes frequently the affection of the mind and the action which accompanies recollection; to remember by actual celebration, to commemorate, as applied to the sabbath, & c. ... remembrance, memory..." (Wilson P. 347)

No matter how involved we get in life and no matter how sweet it is, it must always be kept in our minds in such a way that we are bearing it in mind at all times. We must never let this fact slip too far from the mind. The days of darkness that are coming must be in our minds at all times. They must be prepared for and worked toward. A transition period is coming. The time when it begins varies from country to country and culture to culture. In some cultures because of diet and health problems, it can begin earlier and in others it can be later. God sets the norm at seventy or by reason of strength eighty. Our own culture has stretched that a little bit just as others have found it shorter, but this is the norm, and there is something very important that can be gained if we keep this in our minds and "number our days," for this will give us a "heart of wisdom."

The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Ps 90:10-12

At some point, for most just a few years before death, a great transition occurs. A transition which darkens the sun and leads one to reflect that there is no pleasure left in life. He will speak on this transition, on the days of darkness in 12:1-5. They are days when the senses of the body fail, days when fears begin to grow, days when one is not strong and cannot do all that they desire. These days will be many, and he sums them up with a well known term.

All that is coming is vanity.

All who are presently enjoying their days of light and sweetness must look toward the future and seriously reflect on that which is to come. The pleasures of life will continue on a downward slide until the time is reached where one will find the words wrenched from even their own mouths "*I have no pleasure in them*" (Ecc. 12:1). This is the very best that one has to look forward to as a child born into this world. Hence again, let one live their life of cautious optimism while they may. Let them fully enjoy that which can be enjoyed in their life "under the sun," but let them also realize that it is all only for the day, and no one knows what tomorrow might bring whether good or bad, but one thing is certain and immovable, all that is coming is vanity.

Yet though this be ever in the forefront of our mind, it is not to remove from youth the enjoyment and contentment that is their due. God wants them to rejoice be cheered in their heart, and enjoy it as much as possible:

9. Rejoice, O young man in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth;

The term “rejoice” speaks of “(1) a spontaneous, unsustained feeling of jubilation,” “(2) a feeling so strong that it finds expression in some external act, and “(3) a feeling prompted by some external and unsustained stimulus.” It is also “a smiling, cheerful, merry countenance, free from care.”

samach 8055, “to rejoice, be joyful.” This verb ... appears in all periods of Hebrew and about 155 times in the Bible.... usually refers to a spontaneous emotion or extreme happiness which is expressed in some visible and or external manner. It does not normally represent an abiding state of well being or feeling. This emotion arises at festivals, circumcision feasts, wedding feasts, harvest feasts, the overthrow of one’s enemies, and other such events.... suggests three elements:(1) a spontaneous, unsustained feeling of jubilation, (2) a feeling so strong that it finds expression in some external act, and (3) a feeling prompted by some external and unsustained stimulus. (Vine’s)

“...to rejoice, to be joyful, to be glad: the primary idea seems to be that of a smiling, cheerful, merry countenance, free from care; sometimes of a louder joy, to be or make merry...” (Wilson p 346)

This is wonderful advice from God! Advice that all young people should be thrilled to take. All devout parents must pass on this advice exactly as it is given here. Earnest and intelligent young men and women who seek to serve God and love His commandments are here given the right to two very wonderful things. First, they should rejoice in their youth, and be glad they are young. They are encouraged to be happy that they have a strong body and many opportunities to live through and enjoy. God wants them to be excited about the novelty and newness of everything.

Second, they are to allow their hearts to cheer them in the days of your youth. They should not hold back their exuberance and excitement. God has created youth for all to enjoy and to relish.

It is not wrong to be filled with joy and gladness because one is young, to be alive, to be filled with youthful enthusiasm and optimism. These are days of gladness, days of discovery and enjoyment. Enjoy them as they pass by. Do not feel guilty for being happy, do not feel frightened at the prospect of age, enjoy the days. Let nothing cause this joy to be quenched. Enjoy your youth. They are to let their hearts “cheer” them. This is a word that describes a heart that is “delighted,” “happy,” “joyful,” and “glad” because things have gone “well with” them.

yatab 3190, “to go well, be pleasing, be delighted, be happy.” This verb appears 117 times in the Old Testament. The meaning of the word, as expressed in Neh. 2:6, is “pleased.” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

3190 yatab- 1) to be glad, to be joyful 2) to be well placed 3)... to be well with, to go well with 4)..., to be pleasing to b)... 1) to make glad, to rejoice 2)... to deal well with (BDB)

A young heart should be filled with optimism and seeking for the things in life that bring delight and joy. No matter what has gone wrong, there is still much to be pleased with and God encourages us to do it.

Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes;

God also encourages young people to walk in the ways of their heart and the sight of their eyes. The term “walk” in both Hebrew and Greek means about the same thing that “live” does in English. Where they were able to walk was used to describe the place where they lived their lives. Here it refers to “*manner of life.*”

3212 yalak- to go, to walk, to come ... 2) ... to live, manner of life (figurative)

God encourages them to live their manner of life according to the “ways” of their heart. This is a very broad Hebrew term that is used over seven hundred times in the Bible. The root meaning of way is “*path,*” “*road,*” or “*highway,*” Referring to the path by which one gets from one place to another. This of course led to a figurative or metaphorical use of “*manner,*” “*conduct,*” or “*condition.*” In this verse it seems best to understand it as “*how and what one does, a “manner, custom, behavior, mode of life.*”

derek 1870, “way (path, road, highway); distance; journey; manner, conduct; condition; destiny.” This noun ... occurs about 706 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods. First, this word refers to a path, a road, or a highway. ... Second, this noun represents a “distance” (how far or how long) between two points: ... In other passages derek refers to the action or process of “taking a journey”: ... In an extended nuance derek means “undertaking”: ... In another emphasis this word connotes how and what one

does, a “manner, custom, behavior, mode of life”: ... derek is applied to an activity that controls one, one’s life-style: “If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee... a man on the throne of Israel.” ... Derek refers to a “condition” in the sense of what has happened to someone. ... In one passage derek signifies the overall course and fixed path of one’s life,... (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

The conclusion then of the book of Ecclesiastes is that though life is vanity, and that there are many vexing and troubling things that will come upon us as we live our lives, God is encouraging those who are young to live the manner of their lives, the how and what of what they do and live their mode of life after their own heart. There are multitudes of ways to live one’s life and each is encouraged to follow the paths and delights of their own heart. This of course is limited to the clause that they are never to forget that God will bring them into judgement, which means they must limit the delights of their heart to those things God allows, but other than it’s being lawful, God has no limits on what they enjoy or do.

Added to this is the expression the “sight” of your eyes. This term describes the multitude of things that strike the “*vision*.” They are simply all the things we have “*seen*.”

4758 mar’eh- sight, appearance, vision a) ... spectacle, appearance, vision b) what is seen c) a vision (supernatural) d) sight, vision (power of seeing) BDB

The things we see often lead to a desire to try them. This can be as simple as a food or beverage that enters our vision and makes us want to try it. It can be a job, hobby, or person we want to get to know better. This advice is no different what Solomon himself tried earlier in the book.

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Ecc 2:10

Youth is a time to try the joys and excitements of life. If one enjoys scuba diving, bicycling, running, swimming, basketball, if they enjoy photography, gardening, collecting, restoring, creating. If they enjoy art, antiques, history, geography, etc. It is not wrong to enjoy such things.

Yet towering above all other things is this final clause that must be taken to heart. It is the most serious thing spoken so far in the book.

But know that for all these God will bring you into judgement.

The term for “know” is a verb used over one thousand times in the Bible. It is used for those things that we “*know by observing and reflecting (thinking)*” and “*know by experiencing*.” This is the knowledge that brings wisdom for as we observe, reflect, think, and experience we find what works and what does not. In this particular context we do not learn this by “*experience with the senses*,” but by “*investigating and proving*” God’s word. Most important is the idea clearly brought out not only in the definition but also in the context that “*the “knower” has actual involvement with or in the object of the knowing.*”

yada` 3045, "to know." periods. This verb occurs about 1,040 times (995 in Hebrew and 47 in Aramaic) in the Bible. Essentially yada` means: (1) to know by observing and reflecting (thinking), and (2) to know by experiencing. ... In contrast to this knowing through reflection is the knowing which comes through experience with the senses, by investigation and proving, by reflection and consideration (firsthand knowing).... Consequently yada` is used in synonymous parallelism with "hear" Exod. 3:7, "see" Gen. 18:21, and "perceive, see" Job 28:7. ... Thirdly, this verb can represent that kind of knowing which one learns and can give back... In addition to the essentially cognitive knowing already presented, this verb has a purely experiential side. The "knower" has actual involvement with or in the object of the knowing. ... (Vines)

God wants each day of our life to be lived with great concern and personal involvement with the truth that a judgment day is looming off in the future when we will stand before Him. He explains this more fully at the end of the book.

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. Ecc 12:14

Even the additional light of the New Testament doesn’t offer much more than this.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Cor 5:10

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, Heb 9:27

All young people must take these verses to heart as they live their lives and make the choices offered above. God wants us to be happy, he wants us to enjoy our youth and to get as much as we can from it. He wants us to

withhold nothing enjoyable from our eyes, but with all of this, He wants it first and foremost in our minds that our eternal destiny may rest on the next choice we make. We must therefore do as the young man in Psalms 119:

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! 11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You! 12 Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes! ... 47 And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love. 48 My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes. ... 97 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. 98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. 102 I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Ps 119:9-12; 47-48; 97-105

10. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart,

Should this new thought of the coming judgement change the advice given above? Does the fact that a servant of the LORD understands that he will be judged for all that he does “take all the fun out of life?” Does it lead to one feeling that all that they might have done is now removed? Absolutely not! Just the opposite. A true understanding of the coming judgment and all the wonderful things God has created for the young to enjoy while living under the full responsibility of His commandments still allows Him to say that the young must remove sorrow from their hearts. The term “remove” speaks of the need to “turn aside,” “depart,” “avoid,” or “be removed.” It can also mean “to put aside” “retract,” “reject.” or “abolish.”

5493 cuwr or suwr (Hos. 9:12)- to turn aside, to depart a) ... 2) to depart, to depart from way, to avoid 3) to be removed ... 2) to put aside, to leave undone, to retract, to reject, to abolish d)... “ (BDB)

It is obvious with the use of this strong term that God is very serious. There is no reason for young men and women to be sorrowful. Before commenting further on this, it is important to see exactly what is meant by “sorrow.” In English it generally means grief, but in Hebrew, it takes in a much broader group of emotions which includes “vexation” “anger” “grief,” “indignation,” “provocation,” and “frustration”.

3708 ka` ac vexation: -anger, angry, grief, indignation, provocation, ... sore, sorrow, spite, wrath. (Strongs)

3708 ka` ac anger, vexation, provocation, grief... frustration (BDB)

This can be both good and natural sorrow such as the mourning over the loss of a loved one, but it can also be sorrow borne of frustration, disappointment and bitterness. God obviously is not asking us to abolish the sadness that we feel for the lose of those we love. But it would make perfect sense that the vexations of “life under the sun” must not be taken into the heart and allowed to reside there. In my opinion this is what God is demanding here. He seeks for the man like Paul who can be content in all the vexing and trying circumstances of life under the sun. A man who knows how to be abased and to abound.

He counsels all to remove, turn aside, avoid and reject the sorrows brought about by frustration, vexation and provocations. There is an easygoing attitude which can accept the bitter things of life and still continue to enjoy the good. This is the attitude which Solomon cultivates here.

Job had it after he lost all his possessions and later his health.

And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” Job 1:21

But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips. Job 2:10

What Solomon concluded at the beginning of the book will slowly and painfully sink in to the hearts of those who are young. It truly is all vanity. This can lead to cynicism or to submission. It can lead to vexation and frustration or to trust in God and a gradual letting go of more and more things into his hands. God counsels the latter. Life will bring us to Him more and more fully as we age. It will lead us to a letting go of this life and a preparing and gradual excitement about the one to come. But it doesn’t have to be rushed. God allows us the time to prepare. Let your dreams and you hopes take you where you will, and remove the frustration and bitterness that can arise when you learn that they are all just above your reach.

All sorrows have a part to play in character building and becoming mature, but one type must always be removed from the heart whenever it is seen. Even the best and most wholesome sorrows can make one perpetually bitter, frustrated and disillusioned with life. If it is allowed to creep into their hearts in ones youth, it will grow deeper as the years pass and the reasons for having it grow more and more powerful. Those who are young are commanded to remove this from their heart. It will poison their future. It is an emotion which grows stronger and stronger as it shuts out all light and pleasure from life.

And put away evil from your flesh,

Please review the comments in Ecc 9:3 to fully see the dilemma of translating the term evil. When it describes morality they are “*morally evil or hurtful,*” “*wicked,*” “*bad or evil.*” This includes “*evil words, evil thoughts, or evil actions.*” But when it describes a quality of life “under the sun” they are things that are “*bad or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or unhappiness,*” and “*the antithesis of shalom(peace; welfare, well-being).*” We will have a very different view of this passage depending upon which we define the term. Most commentaries take the latter view of health to the body, but the words of the Pulpit commentary put it all into a clearer perspective:

Many commentators consider the evil here names is physical, not moral, the author enjoining his young disciple to take proper care of his body, not to weaken it on the one hand by asceticism, nor on the other by indulgence in youthful lusts. In this case the two clauses would urge the removal of what respectively affects the mind and body, the inner and outer man. but the ancient versions are unanimous in regarding the “evil” spoken of as moral. Thus the Septuagint gives *ponerian*, “wickedness;” the vulgate, *malitiam*. Similarly the Syriac and Targum. And, according to our interpretation of the passage, such is the meaning here. It is a call to early piety and virtue...” (Pulpit Commentary Vol 9 P. 280-281)

Once again, they are both Scriptural. God wants us to take care of the body as it is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Cor 6:19-20

While at the same time Paul tells the youthful Timothy to flee youthful lusts:

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Tim 2:22

The context will not help make the decision. Choose one or the other or both.

For childhood and youth are vanity.

The point here seems to be that even childhood and youth must not be taken too seriously or too much importance placed upon them. The “your only young once” philosophy is here destroyed. As also is the idea that one ought to sow their wild oats in their youth. Youth is vanity, only a brief period to live through. It holds no lasting value or meaning. It is not to be placed on some pedestal, or viewed more highly than other periods of life, it is only vanity which “*soon vanishes away.*” Youth is only a “*a vapor*” or a “*bubble.*” When placed on a scale, youth is as “*empty, fruitless,*” “*meaningless and purposeless*” as all the rest of “life under the sun”(see notes on Ecc 6:2 for full definition of vanity).

Childhood and youth are something which soon vanishes away, just like a vapor or a bubble. It seems long while we pass through it, but once it is used, it is only seen as a step leading to eternity. How short, far away, and empty it seems after it is gone.

Those early and carefree days when father and mother bore all the responsibilities and we “didn’t have a care in the world.” Days when the world was full of promises and eternity while here “under the sun” seemed almost within our grasp. Days of idealistic expectations and hopeful optimism. they seemed like they would never end, and that they were the most important things in the world. We were the new generation that would fix everything and enjoy everything. We would all live forever and make a real difference.

Now, they have passed and though the memories are strong and ever with us, they teach a valuable lesson about how all the remainder of our lives “under the sun” will go. Just as childhood burst like a bubble, or like a mist simply vanished away almost before we were aware of it, so too will all other periods. Yet this is the heart of the vanity of childhood and youth. It simply vanishes away, bit by bit, so slowly one hardly recognizes it until one day it is forever gone.