

Ecclesiastes 2:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

Analysis

And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them—the Hebrew 'sha'al' (שָׁאַל, desired/asked) suggests eyes making requests that Solomon granted unconditionally. He denied himself nothing visually appealing or aesthetically pleasing. **I withheld not my heart from any joy**—complete indulgence in every form of pleasure. The phrase 'simchah' (שִׂמְחָה, joy) encompasses happiness, celebration, and delight. Solomon's experiment was comprehensive and unrestrained.

Yet despite unlimited indulgence, he concludes: **for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour**. The Hebrew 'cheleq' (חֵלֶק, portion) refers to one's allotted share or inheritance. After exhausting every pleasure, Solomon's only lasting 'portion' was the temporary enjoyment derived from the work itself—not from accumulated possessions or achievements, but from the process of labor. This prepares for verse 11's devastating conclusion: even this temporary enjoyment proves 'vanity and vexation of spirit.' The verse anticipates Jesus's warning: 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Mark 8:36).

Historical Context

Solomon's resources enabled unprecedented experimentation. Unlike ordinary people constrained by limited means, he could pursue every desire to its logical

conclusion. First Kings 11:3 mentions 700 wives and 300 concubines—reflecting indulgence in sensual pleasure. Yet Deuteronomy 17:17 explicitly prohibited kings from multiplying wives, warning 'that his heart turn not away.' Solomon violated this prohibition, and 1 Kings 11:4 records the consequence: 'when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods.' Ecclesiastes represents the wisdom gained through painful experience—unlimited indulgence doesn't satisfy but rather exposes the soul's infinite capacity, which only God can fill. Augustine later articulated this truth: humans possess a 'God-shaped vacuum' that nothing else can satisfy. The Puritans emphasized that created things are good gifts to be enjoyed gratefully within God's boundaries, but become idols when pursued as ultimate sources of satisfaction.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What desires are you denying yourself, and what desires are you indulging—and how do you discern between godly self-discipline and harmful deprivation?
2. How does Solomon's discovery that even unlimited pleasure-seeking yields only temporary enjoyment challenge your expectations about satisfaction?

Interlinear Text

וְכָל	אֲשֶׁר	וְשָׁאַל וְ	עֵינַי	אֶצְלִיתִי	לֹא	יָמָּה
H3605	H834	desired	And whatsoever mine eyes	H3808	I kept	H1992
		H7592	H5869		H680	
לֹא	מִןּ	עָנִיתִי	אֶת	לִבִּי	מִכָּל	שִׂמְחָה
H3808	not from them I withheld	H4513	H853	for my heart	H3605	from any joy
			H3820		H8057	H3588
לִבִּי	שִׂמְחָה	מִכָּל	עֲמָלִי	וְזֶה	הַ	
for my heart	rejoiced	H3605	in all my labour	H2088	H1961	
H3820	H8056		H5999			
וְזֶה	הַ	מִכָּל	עֲמָלִי			
and this was my portion		H3605	in all my labour			
H2506			H5999			

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 9:9 (Parallel theme): Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 3:22 (Parallel theme): Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Ecclesiastes 5:18 (Parallel theme): Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.

Psalms 119:37 (Parallel theme): Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

Psalms 128:2 (Parallel theme): For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands:
happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.

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