

# Ecclesiastes 2:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

## Analysis

**For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity** (בְּחִכָּתָה וּבְדִעָת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן) —the threefold description emphasizes comprehensive excellence. 'Chochma' (חִכָּתָה) is wisdom, 'da'at' (דִּעָת) is knowledge, and 'kishron' (כִּשְׁרוֹן) means skill or equity. This worker did everything right—applied wisdom, accumulated knowledge, and demonstrated skillful execution. Yet the devastating reality follows: **to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion.**

The Hebrew 'chelko' (חֶלְקָה, his portion) refers to an inheritance or allotted share—the lazy heir receives what the diligent worker earned. This is not merely **vanity** (חֲבֵל, hevel) but **a great evil** (רַעַת כָּבֵה, ra'ah rabbah)—an intensified moral outrage. The wise worker's labor enriches someone who contributed nothing, violating justice and mocking merit. This verse shatters meritocracy's illusion: earthly reward doesn't correlate perfectly with effort or virtue. Only God's final judgment will rectify this inequity (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

## Historical Context

In ancient agrarian societies, inheritance laws determined economic stability. Israelite law mandated primogeniture with the eldest son receiving a double

portion (Deuteronomy 21:17), regardless of his merit or father's preference. Solomon witnessed this pattern: worthy younger sons sometimes lost inheritance to unworthy elder brothers. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) later illustrated this dynamic—the wasteful son received his portion while the faithful son continued working. Ecclesiastes challenges the prosperity gospel's ancient equivalent: the assumption that diligent work guarantees proportional reward. Reformed theology emphasizes that earthly distribution of rewards is not perfectly just—only at the final judgment will works receive appropriate recompense.

## Related Passages

---

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

## Study Questions

---

1. When have you labored skillfully only to see others benefit who didn't contribute to the work, and how did you process that injustice?
2. How does trusting God's final judgment free you to work with excellence even when earthly rewards seem unfairly distributed?

## Interlinear Text

---

וְבַדְעַת	בְּחִכְמַת	ה	שְׁעִמְلָה	וְلֹאֵד	מ	יְשִׁפְעָל	כִּי
H3588	For there is		a man	whose labour	is in wisdom	and in knowledge	
	H3426		H120	H5999	H2451		H1847
בְּזַעַל	עִמְלָה		וְלֹאֵד	מ	וּבְכִשְׁר	וְלֹ	בַּזְעָל
and in equity	a man	H3808	that hath not laboured		H5998	H0	
H3788							
וְלֹאֵד	מִלְקָה	וְלֹאֵד	מִלְקָה	וְלֹאֵד	מִלְקָה	וְלֹאֵד	מִלְקָה
therein shall he leave	it for his portion	H1571	H2088	H1892	This also is vanity	evil	
H5414						H7451	
בְּבָהָה							
and a great							
H7227							

---

From KJV Study • [kjvstudy.org](http://kjvstudy.org)