

Ecclesiastes 2:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Analysis

The Preacher reveals divine sovereignty in distribution of life's goods: 'For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God.' The Hebrew 'tov lephanav' (טוב לִפְנֵי, good in His sight) indicates those who please God, not those achieving self-righteousness. God gives them 'wisdom, knowledge, and joy'—comprehensive blessing including intellectual, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. Conversely, 'the sinner' (chote, חֹטֵא) receives 'travail' (inyan, עֲמָל)—burdensome toil. The sinner labors to accumulate, yet ultimately it transfers to the righteous. This verse teaches divine providence in distributing earthly goods: God sovereignly determines who enjoys what they acquire.

Historical Context

Ancient wisdom generally taught that righteousness produces prosperity. Ecclesiastes nuances this: God gives joy to the righteous, not necessarily abundance—and even when sinners accumulate, God transfers it to the just. Job's friends assumed suffering indicated sin; Job's experience complicated this formula. This verse emphasizes not automatic prosperity but divine sovereignty in distribution. The righteous may have less materially yet enjoy it more through

God's gift of contentment. The Reformers emphasized common grace (God's general provision) and special grace (saving favor). Modern prosperity gospel errs by promising automatic wealth; this verse teaches that God's blessing includes joy in whatever He provides.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Do you possess God's gift of joy in your current circumstances, or are you laboring anxiously to accumulate?
2. How does this verse challenge both prosperity gospel and despair about righteousness bringing no blessing?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	לְאָדָם	לְטוֹב	לִפְנֵי	לֵיתָת	חֲכָמָה	וְדַעַת
H3588	to a man	that is good	before	For God giveth	wisdom	and knowledge
	H120	H2896	H6440	H5414	H2451	H1847
וְשִׂמְחָה	וְלַחֹסֵא	לֵיתָת	עֲבָרָה	לְאַסּוֹף	וְלִכְנֹס	
and joy	but to the sinner	For God giveth	travail	to gather	and to heap up	
H8057	H2398	H5414	H6045	H622	H3664	
לֵיתָת	לְטוֹב	לִפְנֵי	הָאֱלֹהִים	גַּם	זֶה	הַבָּל
For God giveth	that is good	before	God	H1571	H2088	This also is vanity
H5414	H2896	H6440	H430			H1892
וְרָעָה	רוּחַ:					
and vexation	of spirit					
H7469	H7307					

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:22 (Sin): A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

Proverbs 28:8 (Parallel theme): He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.

John 16:24 (Parallel theme): Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

Job 32:8 (Spirit): But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

Genesis 7:1 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

Luke 1:6 (References God): And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

James 3:17 (Good): But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Ecclesiastes 1:14 (Spirit): I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.