

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

Analysis

And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God (וְגַם כָּל-הָאָדָם שְׂיֹאכַל וְשָׂתָה וְרָאָה טוֹב בְּכָל-עֲמָלֹו מִתַּת אֱלֹהִים, v'gam kol-ha'adam sheyochal v'shatah v'ra'ah tov b'chol-amalo matat Elohim hi). This verse radically reframes labor's meaning. The ability to **eat and drink**—meet basic needs—and **enjoy the good** (וְרָאָה טוֹב, ra'ah tov, literally 'see good') of one's labor isn't human achievement but **the gift of God** (מִתַּת אֱלֹהִים, matat Elohim).

The Hebrew 'matat' (מִתַּת) emphasizes that enjoyment is a gift, not a right or earned reward. You can labor extensively yet be unable to enjoy its fruits—anxiety, illness, injustice, or death can rob you of satisfaction. Therefore, when you can enjoy your work's good fruits, recognize this as God's gracious gift. This transforms labor from a quest for ultimate meaning into grateful reception of daily grace. Paul later teaches that God 'giveth us richly all things to enjoy' (1 Timothy 6:17)—enjoyment is not guilty indulgence but grateful stewardship of God's gifts. This verse appears five times in Ecclesiastes (2:24; 3:13; 3:22; 5:18; 8:15), emphasizing its centrality.

Historical Context

In the ancient world, many labored without enjoying their work's fruits—slaves built monuments for masters, peasants farmed lands owned by landlords, conquered peoples paid tribute to foreign powers. The ability to 'eat and drink'

from your own labor was not universal but a covenant blessing (Deuteronomy 28:30-33 lists eating others' produce as a curse). For Israel, enjoying their labor's good fruits depended on covenant faithfulness and God's blessing. Post-exilic Jews, rebuilding under foreign domination (Persian, then Greek, then Roman), found encouragement here: even limited enjoyment of labor's fruits is God's gift, to be received gratefully rather than taken for granted.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. When you enjoy a good meal, a completed project, or rest after labor, do you recognize these as gifts from God rather than merely earned rewards?
2. How does viewing enjoyment as God's gift rather than your achievement change your response to both abundance and scarcity?

Interlinear Text

וְגַם	כָּל	הָאָדָם	שְׂיָאֵכ ל	וְשָׂתָה	וְרָצָה	טוֹב
H1571	H3605					
		And also that every man	should eat	and drink	and enjoy	the good
		H120	H398	H8354	H7200	H2896
בְּכָל	עֲמָלָו	מִתָּת	אֱלֹהֵי יָם	הִיא:		
H3605						
	of all his labour	it is the gift	of God			
	H5999	H4991	H430	H1931		

Additional Cross-References

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.

Ecclesiastes 9:7 (References God): Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 (Good): There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.

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