

Ecclesiastes 6:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?

Analysis

What hath the wise more than the fool? (מה-יוטר לוּכָם מִן-פְּכָסִיל) —The Preacher's question cuts to the bone: if death is the great equalizer, what advantage (yōtēr, 'surplus' or 'profit') does wisdom provide? The second question sharpens the irony: **what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?** The Hebrew phrase 'walk before the living' (לְפָנָים נָגַד הַפָּנִים) means to conduct oneself skillfully in society—yet even this social competence yields no ultimate advantage.

Under the sun, both wise and fool die (2:16). But from an eternal perspective, Proverbs 3:13-18 celebrates wisdom's true profit. The New Testament resolves this tension: Christ is 'the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1:24), and those who gain Him gain eternal advantage.

Historical Context

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes late in life (circa 935 BC), after amassing unprecedented wealth and wisdom. His rhetorical questions reflect the ancient Near Eastern wisdom tradition's dialogue format, where a teacher poses paradoxes to provoke deeper reflection on life's meaning.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Christ transform the question of wisdom's 'profit,' making it not futile but eternal?
2. What practical skills ('walking before the living') do you pursue—and do they serve temporal or eternal ends?

Interlinear Text

רֹאשֵׁת	רְאֵת	מִתְּהִלָּה	לְפָנֶיךָ	מִן	בְּפִסְעָם	מִתְּהִלָּה
H3588	H4100	more	For what hath the wise	H4480	than the fool	H4100
		H3148	H2450		H3684	

לְפָנֶיךָ	בְּפִסְעָם	תִּשְׁתַּחַת	לְפָנֶיךָ	בְּפִסְעָם	תִּשְׁתַּחַת
what hath the poor	that knoweth	to walk	before the living		
H6041	H3045	H1980	H5048		H2416

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 19:1 (Parallel theme): Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.
