

Companionship and Community under the Sun - *Eccles 4:1-16*

Introduction – The objections continue. God is in control of everything and all happens perfectly according to His beautiful plans, but we cannot see that control “under the sun.” In places where we should see justice and righteousness we find instead tyranny and oppression (3:16-17). Ultimately, under the sun, everyone dies, just like the animals, and we cannot experientially find out what happens then (3:18-22). In the midst of these objections we saw that God gives; and we will see that this is where the answers lie to the objections. God gives judgment and vindication (3:17) and God gave us His Son so that we know that He has put death to death. Now we come to the problem of isolation. Ever since the Fall, man has been estranged from God and from his fellow man. Oppression isolates. Envy isolates. Power and success isolate. Finding true and lasting companionship and community seem to be like grasping the wind, were it not for the gift of God.

Oppression Isolates and One Can Find No Comforter (vv1-3) – Tyranny and oppression “*under the sun*” can be so bad that death is preferred - or even non-existence. Righteous Job cursed the day of his birth (Job 3) and Jeremiah wished he had never been born (Jer 20:14-18). Many, when experiencing deep pain or sorrow also experience a terrifying sense of isolation; “nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen.” There seems to be no one to provide comfort or companionship. Jesus experienced this in Gethsemane, suffering alone while his best friends fell asleep, and then again upon the cross where nearly all abandoned Him.

Envy Isolates and One Can Find No Comforter (vv4-8) – Envy keeps us from rejoicing with our neighbor (v4). Laziness destroys us and we have nothing to give (v5). A miserly attitude to our possessions produces a workaholic mentality, and while we may succeed in gathering riches, we find ourselves friendless, consumed with our stuff and all alone (vv6-8).

Power Isolates and One Can Find No Comforter (vv13-16) – The corridors of power can be very lonely places. Those who are successful leaders are warned here; there is no substitute for being involved in a real community of peers. Relying on fame and personal glory is a vapor. The polls shift like the winds and so will your popularity and usefulness in the eyes of those who happen to favor you today.

The Value and Gift of Companionship and Community (vv9-12) – In the middle of the chapter we find a proverb on the value of companionship. Two cannot be together if God does not give the gift, and three will only produce a bitter triangle unless God gives the gift. But when He does, it truly is a gift because He gives....

Someone to Share the Gift With (v9) – Work has meaning primarily as a means of expressing love, not as a means of accumulating individual wealth. Deep satisfaction comes when there is someone to enjoy what God has given you with you. Deeper satisfaction comes when there is someone to give the gift to beyond yourself, for this is God-like.

Someone to Help You and For You to Help (v10) – Life has meaning when, like God, we can give it away. And how often in this life under the sun do we need encouragement (Heb 10:24-25).

Warmth (v11) – Far more than simply a marriage-verse, this hints at the deep needs we have in all the necessities of life for one another just to get by. Even when doing something as simple as sleeping (and think of an ancient traveler out in the cold), companionship provides that which we cannot provide for ourselves.

Protection (v12) – Someone who lives a disconnected and isolated life is far more vulnerable to the sinful oppression all around and in us. A godly society, culture, and community provide the strongest protection.

Rebuilding Companionship and Community – Here are several final observations.

The Misery of Isolation – “*It is not good for man to be alone,*” has more applications than the marriage relationship. God intends mankind to live in intimate fellowship and community on a number of levels. The devastation of the fall brought about an estrangement between man and his Creator as well as between man and his fellow image-bearer.

The Gift of Companionship and Community – This chapter must be read in the context of the argument, including 3:12, 22, and 5:18ff. We cannot find satisfaction in our relationships with ourselves or with others under the sun. But this is part of the gift of our heritage, the portion God gives. And this goes both ways. It also means, strangely, that because God gives this grace, people like to be with you too. A faithful evaluation of oneself should lead each of us to the conclusion that “it is nothing less than a miracle that anyone would want to be my companion.”

Restoration of Companionship and Community – The work of the Cross has brought about a resurrection in our life with God and with one another. Restored to God we find that we are restored to one another. The one cannot occur without the other (1 John 3:16-17, 4:20-21). When we are saved we are baptized into a community. Our salvation is individual but it is never autonomous.

Building Companionship and Community – For the church this means we have to leave our comfort zones and safe-havens and serve one another, which is always uncomfortable and costly. Those who are blessed with community must bring others in. The scriptures require that we consider those who are isolated: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (i.e. James 1:27).