

# Confronting Futility at Work

*Ecclesiastes 4:1-16*

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Work is often futile and unsatisfying. While this can play out in many different ways, one major reason is simply the presence of people and our relationship with them. All people are sinful and work is fundamentally social

## Confronting Futility at Work - Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

Ecclesiastes is a wisdom book. The genre of wisdom literature focuses on God as Creator and teaches how one ought to live in light of God as Creator. Ecclesiastes focus on one central question: what gain there is in life (Eccles. 1:3)? The preacher (author of Ecclesiastes) repeatedly gives this verdict: all of life is vanity (futility), a chasing after the wind (Eccles. 1:2, 14, 17; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 23, 26). While Ecclesiastes brand of wisdom is insufficient (observations that begin from humanity rather than God's revelation), it is still God's Word and helpful as a perspective on the reality of life.

The main point of the message is this - confront the futility of work by fighting sin at the workplace.

The structure of Ecclesiastes 4:1-16 is like a double-cheeseburger. The beginning (vv. 1-3) and end (vv. 13-16) are the two buns that view the vertical relationships between people, and the middle passages (vv. 4-6, 7-12) the two patties that view the horizontal relationship.

### 4 Points

#### **1. Comfort the Oppressed (vv. 1-3)**

vv. 1-3 - The preacher observed horrifying and extreme oppression at work. Such oppression are not merely ancient concepts; sin is an ever-present reality. The Bible recognises oppression as evil and the text shows us that we ought to comfort the oppressed (v. 1).

Being available is a key first step to comforting the oppressed. At the same time, we need to seek forgiveness from our blind sin of oppression over people we have authority over. Let us guard our hearts against defensiveness, repent and seek forgiveness. Let us also be agents of comfort to the oppressed.

#### **2. Cherish Wise Leaders (vv. 13-16)**

In the realm of leadership, experience and wealth pale in comparison to wisdom. Yet wise leadership seems to wean over time (v. 16). The preacher tells that wise leadership is futile and fleeting. One way we can confront futility is to cherish our wise leaders. Let our allegiance and obedience to Christ stop us from fleeing from wise leaders. Let us affirm and appreciate the wise leaders among us.

#### **3. Cultivate Contentment (vv. 4-6)**

The preaches points out a clear feature of our sinful condition - competing jealousy. While seeking excellence is a good thing, the underlying motivation of jealousy is futile (v. 4). The fool (opposite of the wise in wisdom literature) is led to self-ruin because of his idleness ((v. 5). The preacher denounces both idleness and competitive jealousy and commends quiet contentment (v. 6). This is a God given gift (Eccles. 5:19). This contentment is borne out of our secure identity as children of God, loved by Him.

#### **4. Collaborate with Partners (vv. 7-12)**

The preacher declares the act of isolated toil as futile (v. 7). He beautifully depicts collaborative partnership (vv. 9-12). The word 'another' (v.10) is conceptually linked to 'other' (v. 8). They are the same word. Collaborative partnership is the wise alternative to isolation. The preacher also reminds that partnership

can involve more than 2 people (v. 12). Let us find contentment and seek to partner with others without seeking credit or reward.

Jesus' death on the cross not just purchased our redemption, but also the renewal of creation. While God subjected creation to futility, Pauls shows that all will be freed from futility when Christ returns to make all things new (Rom. 8:19-21). As we continue to confront futility at work, let us do so with the hope of Christ returning and setting it free from all futility!