

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-26

All Is Vanity

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

1:2 Briefly states the author's theme (see 12:8). (CSB)

Meaningless! This key term occurs about 35 times in the book and only once elsewhere (Job 27:12). The Hebrew for it originally meant “breath” (see Ps 39:5, 11; 62:9; 144:4). The basic thrust of Ecclesiastes is that all of life is meaningless, useless, hollow, futile and vain if it is not rightly related to God. Only when based on God and his word is life worthwhile. (CSB)

Hbr *hebel*, “mere breath” (cf Jas 4:13–14). By repetition, he describes life that drones on and on until death, life that is empty apart from the Lord. Luth: “This is a Hebraism.... They say “Song of Songs,” that is, the supreme and most excellent song that Solomon composed. Vanity of vanities, that is, the greatest and highest vanity of all, total and utter vanity” (AE 15:13). Vanity is the seemingly endless loop of life searching for meaning and absolute contentment but never really finding satisfaction. *Vanity of vanities*. Translated in LXX as “frustration” (or “futility,” Rm 8:18–22) to reflect the condition of creation, the despair of a world without God. Jesus Christ, by virtue of His cross and resurrection, has redeemed us from this meaninglessness and vanity. Luth: “Solomon introduced courtly language; and as courtiers make it a practice to avoid the simple language of their fathers, especially in writing, so Solomon does also, to avoid giving the impression that he speaks as the common people do. He departs from the simplicity not only of his father but also of Moses” (AE 15:13). (TLSB)

The original idea behind the term “meaningless” is “breath.” This idea becomes very vivid on a cold day, when we see our breath, only to see it quickly vanish. St. James captured this thought when he wrote “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). Because it is so fleeting and unstable, life seems to be vain, frustrating, without purpose, empty – in a word, “meaningless.” (PBC)

How accurately this describes life on earth! Beneath all the hustle and bustle, the tinsel and glitter, lurks that terrible sense of emptiness. But it was not that way in Eden, before man fell into sin. It is part of God's judgment upon our sinful world. “The creation was subjected to frustration,” declared the Apostle Paul, “not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it” that is God Himself (Romans 8:20). It is interesting to note that the name Adam and Eve gave their second son, Abel, is the Hebrew word for “Meaningless.” Perhaps this was their commentary on life after the Fall. (PBC)

It was a season when the fortunes of Israel stood at low ebb; men in Israel were discouraged and disappointed; faith burned with a dim light. One reason for this spiritual and physical depression was the fact that men had expected too much from purely earthly values. If a man assesses the worth of earthly things rightly he will not expect too much of them, and consequently when they fail him, he will not be unduly disappointed. (Leupold)

all is vanity. See v. 8; whatever man undertakes apart from God. (CSB)

Everything that is looked to for meaning in life, including wealth, pleasure, and philanthropy. (TLSB)

The Vanity of Wisdom

12 I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

1:12-13 Luther: “Let us learn, therefore, to submit ourselves to the counsels of God and to refrain from the cares and thoughts that God has not commanded. There is nothing safer or more acceptable to God than if we refrain from our own counsels and rely on His Word. There we shall find sufficient guidance about what we ought to do. His commands to us are faith, love, and bearing the cross. With these things, I say, we can happily occupy ourselves. Let us deal with everything else as it comes into our hands, leaving to Him the concern about its outcome” (AE 15:25). (TLSB)

1:12 I. The author shifts to the first person, returning to the third person only in the conclusion (12:9–14). (CSB)

The author now speaks personally about his experiences and study. (TLSB)

1:13 wisdom – By philosophic inquiry, a sense in which the word wisdom is often used in this book. (CB)

unhappy business – Wearisome and unsatisfying toil. The reference is to “all the works that are done under the sun” by men. (CB)

Politics and human affairs are complex and become a burden upon body and soul. The Preacher’s exploration of wisdom was vigorous and constant as he gained insight into philosophy, mathematics, trade, merchandise, mechanics, history, kingdoms, law, etc. (TLSB)

God. The only Hebrew word the writer uses for God is *Elohim* (used almost 30 times), which emphasizes his absolute sovereignty. He does not use the covenant name, *Yahweh* (translated “LORD.”) (CSB)

given to the children of man – Literally means “sons of man,” that is, the sons of Adam. Again our thoughts are drawn back to the early history of mankind and to everything it means to be a descendant of the first man and woman. We are conceived and born in sin, as Solomon’s father David declared in Psalm 51. Mankind struggles under the curse of sin. All this is part of the “heavy burden” to which God has subjected fallen creation. (PBC)

1:14 striving after the wind. A graphic illustration of futility and meaninglessness (see Introduction: Purpose and Method). These words are used nine times in the first half of the discourse (here; v. 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9; see also 5:16). (CSB)

Wind can be used (e.g., in sailing ships), but never captured. People cannot master the world, lay bare its foundational secrets, or break the bonds of sin and death (cf Jb 38–39). Life apart from the Lord is chasing after something that cannot be captured (cf Jn 16:33). (TLSB)

The old KJV translates this expression “vexation of spirit.” Since the Hebrew word for wind and spirit is the same, either might fit the tone of Ecclesiastes. Yet the idiom “chasing the wind” seems to give is the better picture. In and of themselves, all human endeavors are but futile attempts to grab hold of the wind. You clench it in your fist and what do you have? A handful of nothing! No matter how much you see and learn, that’s what you end up with. (PBC)

Along with Solomon and a few others, the Greek philosopher Socrates (460-399 B.C.) stands as one of history's greatest thinkers. His search for wisdom led to a conclusion not unlike Solomon's: "I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance." (PBC)

Hosea 12:1, "Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt."

The Vanity of Toil

18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, 19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. 20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. 24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment[c] in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him[d] who can eat or who can have enjoyment? 26 For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

2:17 *I hated all my toil* – This brings to mind Christ's statement, "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). Solomon describes himself as a weary embittered worldling. Christ speaks of the man of faith who overcomes this dying, sinful world by clinging to that which is eternal. Yet the two are not so far apart as they might first appear. The person whose heart is filled with despair and hatred of his earthly life is often ripe for the good news of Christ and His victorious love. (PBC)

Solomon soon became weary of his labor and looked upon it with contempt. It burdened and fatigued him as he aged and his sorrow increased. This world is a vale of tears even for the privileged. Those who are burdened are invited to come to the Lord for rest (Mt 11:28). (TLSB)

2:18 *Ii toil under the sun* – Estate accumulated by labor. (CB)

leave them to the one who comes after me. Death ultimately separates from us our profits (cf Jb 8:9). They pass to the next generation (cf v 21; Lk 12:20). (TLSB)

Another sad disadvantage under which the wise man labors. He must leave all his estate to his successor, who may be a fool – as Rehoboam, Solomon's son, actually was in comparison with his father. (CB)

This verse has the same ring to it as God's words to the rich fool, "Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" Solomon's concern about the person who will come after him is not simply a generalized statement of truth. He brings it home to his own life. Perhaps when he wrote this he was having serious doubts about his son Rehoboam. As it turned out, Rehoboam did bring many of Solomon's spectacular achievements to ruin (1 Kings 12). (PBC)

2:19 *who knows ... ?* For a more searching "Who knows ... ?" for secular man see 3:21. (CSB)

A wise person increases an inheritance; a fool squanders it and undoes the master's work (cf Mt 25:14–30). Solomon is likely considering his son Rehoboam and other potential heirs. Rehoboam's high taxation (1Ki 12:1–20; 2Ch 10) led Israel to revolt. (TLSB)

2:20 *despair* – Meaninglessness creates despair and depression. (TLSB)

2:21 *must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toiled for it* – As if obsessed with the thought, the Teacher repeats the fact that the wealth of an industrious man often falls into the hand of a good-for-nothing. What is it that makes this such “a great misfortune” (literally, “a great evil”)? It is one those things that make life so unfair. Not only does a person struggle and sweat for a lifetime, but he goes down to the grave without any guarantee that what he leaves behind will be appreciated or used wisely. (PBC)

2:22–23 Humans cannot add a single moment to their life span (Mt 6:27; Lk 12:16–21). Disappointment is guaranteed. (TLSB)

2:23 *all his days are full of sorrow and his work is a vexation* – Though written centuries ago by a Jewish king, it could have been written yesterday by an American businessman. (PBC)

When overcome by daily business and hopeful for evening rest, one spends the night with eyes open, heart pounding, brain in full process worrying about things to come. (TLSB)

2:24–25 The heart of Ecclesiastes, a theme repeated in 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7 and climaxed in 12:13. Only in God does life have meaning and true pleasure. Without him nothing satisfies, but with him we find satisfaction and enjoyment. True pleasure comes only when we acknowledge and revere God (12:13). (CSB)

2:24 **MAN CAN DO NOTHING BETTER** – It is our duty and privilege to receive with glad and thankful hearts the gifts of God's providence, and to enjoy them without anxious thought for the morrow. Thus we gain from them all the good which they are capable of yielding. But unless we lift our hearts upwards from the gifts of God the infinite Giver, we shall find “this too is a chasing of the wind.” (CB)

enjoyment – Theme is repeated in 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7. Blatant hedonism is not suggested here. We are to receive God's gifts and use them cheerfully, knowing they will never bring absolute happiness (12:13). (TLSB)

toil – Note 2:10-11 TLSB – Terms for “toil” and “work” appear more than 25 times in Ec. Work brought pleasure. But reviewing the pleasure he sought and the great accomplishments gained, Solomon gained no advantage or satisfaction because there was no profit “under the sun.” Even with wisdom, toil is meaningless apart from the fear of God. (TLSB)

from the hand of God – Small Catechism – Fourth Petition, p xxxviii; cf Ps 145:15–16; Ac 17:28; Eph 5:20. (TLSB)

2:25 *apart from him* – How can one follow the Teacher's advice and find satisfaction in his work, when as Solomon has so powerfully demonstrated, labor is meaningless and a chasing after the wind? The king immediately answers that this is possible one from the hand of God (V 24). God's hand symbolizes his power, and that power is boundless. As Jesus said, “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). (PBC)

2:26 *one who pleases him* – Here faith enters the picture. Only faith in Christ can pierce through this fallen world’s dark cloud of vanity to see the bright love and mercy of the almighty God. The person who “pleases God” is none other than the believer. Scripture states, “Without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). (PBC)

but to the sinner. For exceptions to this general principle see 8:14; Ps 73:1–12. (CSB)

For the sinner, gifts are easily corrupted and exploited for pleasure. They tantalize, tyrannize, and imprison. True wisdom comes from God alone (cf Ps 111:10; Pr 2:6; Christ is wise: 1Co 1:24, 30). The passage describes God’s judgment over both faith and works. (TLSB)

Though all are sinners, the term here applies only to the unbelieving, unrepentant sinner. This sinner possesses nothing, while the believer receives all good things. (PBC)

who pleases God – Not necessarily the righteous, but whomever God allows to inherit. (TLSB)

this also is vanity – Enjoying one’s labor is the most that one can gain from it, yet it is unsatisfying. (CB)

2:18–26 toil and labor “under the sun” can drive one to the brink of grievous despair. The so-called significant things of this life become idols that ultimately pass away and provide no lasting value in the context of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ (cf Mt 6:19-24). Our gracious heavenly Father extends his Son, our Lord * Most precious heavenly Father, you have given us many priceless gifts by your gracious hand. We ask not for silver or gold but for a strong and firm faith. Let us not live for pleasure in things of the world, but comfort and refresh us in your healing Word. Then in right faith, we may trust in your grace to the very end. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Colossians 3:1-11

Put On the New Self

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your[a] life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.[c] 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

3:1 *if* – *oun* – Then or therefore and refers back to the whole of the precious part in particular to what the Colossians have themselves experienced in their vital connection with the supreme God-man and his work which is so complete and mighty in every respect. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

then. “Then” (or “therefore”) links the doctrinal section of the letter with the practical section, just as it does in Ro 12:1; Eph 4:1; Php 4:1. (CSB)

you have been raised.† Verses 1–10 set forth what has been described as the indicative and the imperative (standing and state) of the Christian. The indicative statements describe the believer’s position in Christ: He is dead (v. 3); he has been raised with Christ (v. 1); he is with Christ in heaven (“hidden with Christ,” v. 3); he has “taken off the old self” (v. 9); and he has “put on the new self” (v. 10). The imperative statements indicate what the believer is to do as a result: He is to set his heart (or mind) on things above (vv. 1–2); he is to put to death practices that belong to his earthly nature (v. 5); and he is to rid himself of practices that characterized his unregenerate self (v. 8). In summary, he is called upon to become in daily experience what he is through God’s grace in Christ (cf. Ro 6:1–13). (CSB)

Paul uses the same language as in 2:12 to show that Baptism is a means to salvation and to the Christian life. (TLSB)

seek the things that are above – Not spatially but spiritually. Jesus has ascended to His rightful place, from which He governs all things (Jn 8:23). (TLSB)

τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος—The present tense of the imperative (ζητεῖτε) denotes what the readers are to do regularly (“be seeking”) as an ongoing characteristic of their existence. The word itself denotes diligent seeking and so finding. “Above” is to be construed not spatially but soteriologically. What is “above” has to do with the gracious presence of God (Jn 8:23; Gal 4:26; Phil 3:14). Thus, “the things that are above” are those things that have to do with eternal salvation in God’s loving presence. Whereas “right hand” tends to accent Christ’s presence in power, “above” tends to stress his presence in grace (Jn 8:23; Gal 4:26; Phil 3:14), also in Word and Sacrament (Jn 3:3–7). “Above” is further said to be “where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.” This language, with its origin in Psalm 110, was common Christological vocabulary as far back as the ministry of Jesus himself. The right hand is a symbol of power. The right hand of God, therefore, represents universal power (Eph 1:20–21). That Christ is at the right hand of God means that he fills all things (Eph 1:23; 4:10), that is, the entire universe (see the textual note on τὰ πάντα in Col 1:16), so that he is present everywhere as Lord over all, governing all things. Likewise Paul called Christ the head over all (2:10; cf. 2:19). (CC)

There is not much study of heaven because many people believe Scripture does not deal with that issue. According to Bible scholars, your heavenly Father has arranged that no less than one-sixth of His New Testament is filled with references to the joy of heaven and the reappearance of Christ. (Good News – Heaven p. 3) **Colossians 3:1-2** says it well: “*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*”

The Greek word translated “set your hearts on” is zeteo, which denotes man’s general philosophical search or quest. The same word is used in the Gospels to describe how “the Son of Man came to see... what was lost” (Luke 19:10). It’s also used for how a shepherd looks for his lost sheep (Matthew 18:12), a woman searches for a lost coin (Luke 15:8), and a merchant searches for a fine pearl (Matthew 13:45). It is the diligent, active, single-minded investigation. So we can understand Paul’s admonition in Colossians 3:1 as follows: “Diligently, actively, single-mindedly pursue the things above” – in a word, Heaven. (Heaven – Alcorn pp. 20-21)

The verb zeteo is in the present tense, suggesting an ongoing process. “Keep seeking heaven.” Don’t just have a conversation, read a book, or listen to sermon and feel as if you’ve fulfilled the command. Since you’ll spend the next lifetime living in Heaven, why not spend this this lifetime seeking Heaven, so you can eagerly anticipate and prepare for it? C.S Lewis observed, “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. (Heaven – Alcorn p. 21)

right hand of God – Symbol of power. (TLSB)

The right hand is a symbol of power. The right hand of God, therefore, represents universal power (Eph 1:20–21). That Christ is at the right hand of God means that he fills all things (Eph 1:23; 4:10), that is, the entire universe, so that he is present everywhere as Lord over all, governing all things. Likewise Paul called Christ the head over all (2:10; cf. 2:19). (CC p. 135)

3:2 *set your minds* – Πονεῖτε – To be very intent.

Things above – τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε – This entails all thoughts, words, and actions that seek to glorify the risen and exalted Savior, all things that are in keeping with his will. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

things that are on earth – Paul does not despise the things of the earth (1Tm 4:4). However, he realizes that this fallen world should not be our focus. (TLSB)

μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς— This includes things that belong to our sinful nature (the old Adam), which once totally characterized our lives before we were regenerated through our Baptism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

3:3 *you have died* – Col 3:3 also contains several references to the significance of the believer’s Baptism. “You died” (ἀπεθάνετε) is identical in form to the initial verb of 2:20. As there, so also here this verb in the aorist tense recalls the description of Baptism as a participation with Christ in his death as implied in 2:12, a description that is made explicit in the apostle’s letter to the Romans (6:3). (CC p. 137)

NOW HIDDEN – ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ— This reminds us that the glory we will share with Christ may be hidden now, hidden especially to those outside the faith. Believers, however, know that something is different in their lives because Christ lives in them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

3:4 *appears*. Refers to Christ’s second coming. (CSB)

with him in glory – Our eternal life, which we possess now through Baptism, will be fully experienced in heaven. Through Christ, we are participants in God’s glory (Jn 1:14; Php 3:21). (TLSB)

3:5 *put to death* – To get rid of, (items that are mentioned in verse 8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 3)

Paul calls Christians to act on the basis of their gift of faith (Rm 6:11). (TLSB)

sexual immorality – πορνείαν—πορνεία, “fornication,” can refer to any form of wrongful sexual intercourse. In Pauline lists of vices, it (Gal 5:19–21; 1 Thess 4:3–6) or the related noun πόρνος, “fornicator” (1 Cor 6:9–10; Eph 5:5), is typically mentioned first, as lax sexual mores were almost universal in the Hellenistic world of the first century. In 1 Cor 6:18, Paul explains why sexual sins are particularly harmful. (CC p. 142)

impurity – ἀκαθαρσίαν—ἀκαθαρσία, “uncleanness,” often refers to sins of a sexual nature. Note its grouping with πορνεία here and in 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3. Note its grouping with πορνεία here and in 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3. (CC p. 142)

passion – πάθος—πάθος, “passion,” when used with an unfavorable connotation, denotes lusts of a sexual nature (also in Rom 1:26; 1 Thess 4:5). (CC p. 142)

evil desire – ἐπιθυμίαν κακήν—ἐπιθυμία, “desire,” is a more general term than the preceding three. It can be used in a favorable sense (Phil 1:23). Even when used in a negative sense, required here by its modification with “wicked,” the term need not be limited to desires of a sexual nature. (John 8:44; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Tim. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:14) (CC p. 142)

covetousness – πλεονεξία, “covetousness,” is a still more general term than any of the others. Its meaning is “the state of desiring to have more than one’s due.” Hence it often refers to greed (Lk 12:15; 1 Thess 2:5). Paul here styles covetousness as “idolatry,” because covetousness makes what is desired into a god. It is impossible to serve both God and mammon (Mt 6:24). (CC p. 142)

covetousness, which is idolatry. “Whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god” (LC I 3; cf Mt 6:24). (TLSB)

3:6 *wrath of God.* See note on Zec 1:2. God is unalterably opposed to sin and will invariably make sure that it is justly punished. (CSB)

God’s attitude toward sin (Rm 1:18) and unbelief (Jn 3:36) will be fully revealed in the final judgment. (TLSB)

3:7 *once walked* – The verb “walk” (περιπατέω) often refers to how one conducts his way of life. Hence it is sometimes translated “live.” A different verb (ἐζήτε, from ζάω) is rendered “were living” in the latter part of this verse. This brief verse says much about the makeup of the Colossian congregation. Because Judaism, especially in the diaspora, was characterized by its high ethical standards, what is said here probably applies to those who had been Gentile pagans before their conversion to Christianity. Hence, these words indicate the presence of a sizeable number of former Gentiles among the Christians at Colossae. (CC p. 143)

3:8 *but now* – The opening word in the Greek, “now” (νυνί), draws a contrast with the readers’ former conduct in paganism “at one time” (ποτέ, 3:7). (CC p. 143)

put them all away. Lit, “put off,” as a person might “put off” dirty clothing. For Baptism, people wore special garments. The same imagery is found in Is 52:1; 61:10; Zec 3:1–5. (TLSB)

anger, wrath – ὀργή, “anger,” and θυμός, “wrath,” are virtual synonyms, often combined as here to strengthen the thought. Violent activity and not merely emotion seems to be indicated here. (CC p. 143)

If there is any significance at all to the order of vices in Col 3:8, it would seem to be that the hurtful, violent actions implied in the first two terms, “anger” and “wrath” (see the textual note on those words), may well follow a malicious attitude and hurtful speech. Hurtful speech in turn arises from allowing any wrong talk to proceed from one’s mouth (see the textual note on βλασφημίαν, αἰσχρολογία in 3:8), for such wrongful speech itself is a primary indication of the speaker’s hostility toward the Lord and his ways (compare James 3:1–2). (CC p. 149)

malice – κακίαν—κακία is a general term for “wickedness.” But in this context, it seems to point to “malice, ill-will,” which may precede and express itself in the violence implicit in anger and wrath. (CC p. 143)

slander...obscene talk – λασφημίαν, αἰσχρολογία—βλασφημία, “slander,” a term that in other contexts may mean “blasphemy,” is speech hurtful to another, while αἰσχρολογία, “shameful speech,” is

any wrongful speech, even if not directly harmful to another person. The term is used of obscene language. (CC p. 143)

3:9–10 *put off ... put on*. As one takes off dirty clothes and puts on clean ones, so the Christian is called upon to renounce his evil ways and live in accordance with the rules of Christ's kingdom (see vv. 12–14; cf. Gal 3:27). (CSB)

3:9 *old self*. contrast between the “old man” and “new man” is common in Christian writings. The old self is the sinful corruption of our nature inherited from Adam. (TLSB)

3:10 *put on new self* – *endusamenoi* – This is the antonym of what is said in verse nine. It is putting on new clothes like the righteous robe of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 3)

In Baptism, we put on Christ (Gal 3:27) and enter into a saving relationship with Christ. (TLSB)

renewed. See 2 Co 5:17. (CSB)

knowledge. See 1:10; 2:2–3. (CSB)

image of its Creator. Our new relationship of faith restores the image of God that was lost because of sin. The image consists in knowledge of God and holiness. “The image of God is the knowledge of God, righteousness, and truth. Lombard is not afraid to say that original righteousness ‘is the very likeness to God which God implanted in man’ ” (Ap II 20–21). (TLSB)

3:11 *not Greek and Jew...circumcised and uncircumcised* – In Christ, distinctions are removed, whether national (Greek and Jew), social (barbarian and Scythian), or economic (slave and free). (TLSB)

barbarian. Someone who did not speak Greek and was thought to be uncivilized. (CSB)

From present-day southern Russia, they were thought to be the most barbaric of the barbarians. (TLSB)

Christ is all, and is in all. Christ transcends all barriers and unifies people from all cultures, races and nations. Such distinctions are no longer significant. Christ alone matters. (CSB)

GOSPEL – Luke 12:13-21

The Parable of the Rich Fool

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” **14** But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” **15** And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” **16** And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, **17** and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ **18** And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. **19** And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ **20** But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ **21** So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

12:13 *divide the inheritance*. Dt 21:17 gave the general rule that an elder son received double a younger one's portion. Disputes over such matters were normally settled by rabbis. This man's request of Jesus

was selfish and materialistic. There is no indication that the man had been listening seriously to what Jesus had been saying (cf. vv. 1–11). Jesus replied with a parable about the consequences of greed. (CSB)

He asks Jesus to mediate a family dispute. People often brought such problems to respected rabbis. (TLSB)

The evangelist's introduction to 12:13–21 returns the reader's attention to the crowds, who number into the thousands (12:1). Someone from the crowd makes a request about his inheritance. It was common for Jewish people to ask a rabbi or "teacher" (διδάσκαλε) to interpret and apply the Torah to specific cases; the Torah deals with inheritance matters in passages such as Num 27:1–11; 36:7–9; Deut 21:15–17. Jesus, however, refuses to act as arbiter in this worldly dispute. Soon Jesus will describe how he came not to bring peace but a sword, to divide families rather than reconcile them (Lk 12:51–53). Instead of granting the man's request, (CC p. 504)

12:14 Seems ironic, because elsewhere Jesus is called the "one mediator between God and men" (1Tm 2:5) and pictured as the Judge (Mt 25:31–46). Yet vv 15–21 make Jesus' judgment plain. Aug: "He asked for half an inheritance on earth; the Lord offered him a whole inheritance in heaven. The Lord gave more than asked for" (NPNF 1 6:437). (TLSB)

judge or arbiter – μεριστήν—K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 61, notes a possible play on words here between μεριστής, "divider," and μεσίτης, "reconciler." The man wanted someone to divide the property between himself and his brother, with whom he had a dispute, whereas Jesus comes as one who reconciles so that all might be brothers and neighbors (cf. 10:29) at peace. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 685, 688, sees in the word "divider" an allusion to Ex 2:14 that further suggests that Jesus is the prophet like Moses promised in Deut 18:15–18. (CC p. 503)

12:15 *be on guard against all covetousness* – pleonesdzia – This word contains pleon which means more. This is about an insatiable desire for more. John D. Rockefeller was once asked "how much money is enough." The reply was "just a little more." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

Though greed may long lie hidden in one's heart, it eventually manifests itself in a variety of destructive behaviors. (TLSB)

This first general principle warns against the antonym of the proper attitude toward possessions: greed (12:15; πλεονεξία). Greed is an obsession to hoard all things for oneself, blocking out any thought for God or for one's neighbor. It is a close synonym of ἀρπαγή, "rapaciousness" (11:39), the desire to seize more even by force or violence. Possessions become one of the many imagined alternative means of salvation that fly under the banner of "works-righteousness." After noting that the Pharisees were "lovers of money" (16:14), Luke records Jesus' statement to them, "You are those who declare yourselves righteous before men, but God knows your hearts; because that which is high among men is a detestable thing before God" (16:15). The person who succumbs to the temptation of greed is trying to establish and measure his life by what he *has*. Such a person does not understand who he *is* in relation to God and others. Possessions are not the source of true life or wealth in relation to God, as Jesus says, "Not even when it abounds to someone is his life derived from his possessions" (12:15). (CC pp. 505 - 506)

abundance of his possessions – In John 10:10 Jesus says he has come so that we may have life abundantly. Abundance of life is not found in having many possessions, but in having Christ. Abundance will always be a problem. A few years back there was a phrase that stated, "The man who dies with the most toys, wins." To which someone added, but he still dies. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

12:16 *parable*. Jesus' story about coveting responds to the man who asked for help in dividing the inheritance (v 13). (TLSB)

This general principle leads to a parable about a man who already has worldly wealth. The interpretation revolves around the concept of *gift*. To what he has, more abundance is added as *a gift*: his land is fruitful (12:16). The parable is framed by references to the abundant possessions that are a gift bestowed (12:16) and to the gift of life that is to be taken away (12:20). The gift of abundant possessions, like his life, comes to him apart from his own efforts. And so the question confronting him, and the catechumen, is this: What is he going to do with the gift (12:17)? Is he going to share it with his neighbor, as the catechumen in Christ would do? Or is he going to hoard the gift, as a proud and fearful Pharisee might do and thus be guilty of greed? (CC p. 506)

The center of the parable announces his decision concerning his gift. He acts on the basis of his greedy heart. Instead of sharing the gift with his neighbor, he will tear down his old barns and build new ones (12:18). Then the rich man goes even further. He congratulates himself on the “wisdom” of *his* plan. He pronounces his present, and his future, secure (12:19). What is tragic about his response is that he is so completely alone in his decision. He consults with no one—not with God in prayer, nor with family or community. He must speak to his own soul, and his speech concerns his mistaken idea that he is completely self-sufficient. Now that he has taken care of his future, he can only tell *himself* to “rest, eat, drink, be merry” (12:19). His greedy heart has sentenced him to celebrate *alone*. (CC p. 506)

produced plentifully – His abundance was not gotten by fraud or other negative means. He had simply been blessed with a very good crop. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

12:17 *he thought to himself* – διελογίσετο – He was reasoning or debating with himself. He had a number of options including giving the Lord or to the poor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

διελογίζετο—A similar use of the verb to denote the pondering of unbelievers in a parable occurs in 20:14. On Jesus' ability to discern the thoughts of others, see textual note and commentary on 5:21–22. (CC p. 503)

what shall I do – τί ποιήσω—Luke records Jesus' use of soliloquy as a literary device also in 12:45; 15:17–19; 16:3–4; 18:4–5; 20:13. (CC p. 503)

store my crops – τῶν καρπῶν μου—The word *μου* predominates throughout this passage: *my* fruits (12:17), *my* barns, *my* goods (12:18), and *my* soul (12:19). This is reversed when God demands “*your* soul” (12:20; τὴν ψυχὴν σου). (CC p. 503)

12:18 *my goods* – Note use of “I” and *my* in this verse. He totally fails to see that this is a blessing from the Lord. So, he builds more barns and keeps it for himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

12:19 *my soul* – ψυχῆ—Used three times in 12:19–20, this refers to the whole person, considered particularly in his self-conscious (inner) life—and in relationship to God. (CC p. 503)

Reveals this man's heart. Use of “soul” is ironic, for in v 20 the Lord requires judgment of this man's soul. (TLSB)

eat drink and be merry – He forgot the part of the phrase that says “for tomorrow we die.” He was just living for himself and for the present time. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

Not sinful acts in themselves, but here they represent misplaced priorities and values. (TLSB)

φάγε, πίε, εὐφραίνου—Cf. 1 Cor 15:32: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” where Paul draws on Is 22:13; Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15. (CC p. 504)

His greedy heart has sentenced him to celebrate *alone*. (CC p. 506)

12:20 *but God said to him* – God has the last word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

fool! A strong word (11:40; Eph 5:17). (CSB)

By depending on riches rather than God, this man does the opposite of what wisdom requires. Aug: “O, my Brethren, with how many fools does He speak here, when the Gospel is read! When it is read, are not they who hear and do not, fools?” (NPNF 1 6:438). (TLSB)

This man was foolish because he thought he could find security and meaning in possessions. He was foolish because he was not rich toward God. He was foolish because he allowed possessions to possess him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

ἄφρων—Jesus also refers to the Pharisees as “foolish ones” in 11:40, the only other occurrence of this word in the synoptic gospels. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” (Ps 14:1). “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7). Both the Pharisees and the rich fool ignore the catechesis of Jesus. (CC p. 504)

your soul – God subpoenas him for judgment. (TLSB)

ἀπαιτοῶσιν—notes that the third person plural may be translated as a theological passive: “your soul is demanded back from you” *by God*. Cf. Lk 6:38. (CC p. 504)

But before he can rest in his self-pronounced security, the Giver of every good and perfect gift speaks to him. Uninvited, God now enters the dialog and shows that greed, like hypocrisy, leads to death: “Fool, on this very night your soul is demanded back from you [by me]. But the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (12:20). This rich fool did not recognize that the gift of surplus goods was from God. He should not be surprised—but he is—that his very life is also a gift from God and that this gift may be “demanded back” by God at any time. He was so concerned with gaining the whole world that he loses himself and suffers loss (9:25). In this case, he loses his own soul. This is why he is a fool, because the possessions that possessed him during his life are now meaningless when that life is demanded back by God. “Whose will they be?” echoes Eccl 2:18–21. The wisdom of how to use one’s life and possessions is as old as Solomon, and the fool need not have been foolish, if only he had learned from Scripture. But sadly, like the rich man in Lk 16:29–31, and like the Pharisees and lawyers in general (11:49–52; cf. 10:25–37), he failed to heed Scripture. (CC pp. 506-507)

whose will they be – Irony. While working so hard, this man thought only of himself. After his death, however, someone else will enjoy the fruit of all his work. (TLSB)

12:21 *himself* – ἐαυτῷ—He intends his wealth for himself and not for others. He does not show the proper use of possessions, because he does not love his neighbor as himself (Lev 19:18; Lk 10:25–37). (CC p. 504)

rich toward God – To be rich toward God is first of all to believe in Jesus and to trust in the riches he has earned for us in his death on the cross. Then we bring forth fruit of our faith, using our possession for the glory of God and in service of our neighbor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

μη̄ εις θε̄ον̄ πλουτω̄ν—“Blessed [you] poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (6:20). To be rich toward God is to have “treasure in heaven” (cf. 12:33–34, providing a link to the next section of the discourse; see also 6:45; 18:22). (CC p. 504)

To be rich toward God is *to believe* that God is the giver of all things, including life and salvation. *To show that one believes* is to share with others the gifts God gives. This is the consistent teaching of Jesus in his various words about possessions. Behind it is the Gospel of grace: forgiveness is bestowed as God’s free gift in Jesus Christ. Yet a time of accountability will come when God will ask whether his free gift of forgiveness was appropriated through faith or was abused by the arrogant assumption that God’s gifts were personal possessions earned by one’s own efforts and therefore at one’s disposal to hoard or waste foolishly. (CC p. 507)

Obsession with money can crowd God’s ways out of our hearts. That is why Jesus warns so sternly against covetousness (v 15). “This is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure [Luke 12:16–21] and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has no money doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God” (LC I 7–8). Aug: “What is more perverse than a man who wishes to have ‘much goods,’ and does not wish to be good himself?” (NPNF 1 6:438). (TLSB)

12:13–21 Jesus underlines the great danger of being rich in earthly things but poor toward God. In a consumer culture, the dangers of covetousness are often downplayed; in fact, some even try to make greed a virtue. In love for us, however, Jesus warns us against the self-destructive nature of covetousness and gives us new hearts, which He, the very source of life and goodness, fills with joyful satisfaction through the Gospel. • Heavenly Father, keep my eyes from becoming envious and my heart from self-destructive greed. Move me to find satisfaction in Your promises and to trust that You will more than provide for me and my loved ones. Amen. (TLSB)