



Daily Verse and Comment

Ecclesiastes 7:15-18

(15) In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these:
a righteous man perishing in his righteousness,
and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. (16) Do not be
overrighteous,
neither be overwise—
why destroy yourself? (17) Do not be overwicked,
and do not be a fool—
why die before your time? (18) It is good to grasp the one
and not let go of the other.
The man who fears God will avoid all extremes .

New International Version

The situation in verse 15 is a paradox, an irregularity from the way one would expect a thing to be. A paradox is an inconsistency in circumstance, statement, activity, or conduct contrary to what a person would consider normal. Here, the paradox is found within a relationship with [God](#). The sinner prospers, but the righteous suffers all kinds of difficulty in life. Is it not more natural to think that the sinner would have difficulty and the righteous, a prosperous, smooth-running life?

A paradox, in turn, creates a conundrum, that is, a riddle or puzzle. A righteous individual may ask, “Why should such a situation exist?” “Where are the blessings God has promised?” “Where is God in this picture?” “Has God not promised prosperity and long life if we obey Him?” Yes, He has.

Solomon's paradox could spur a carnal person to assume that doing evil, because it can be profitable, is the better way. This especially seems so when the evil person lives to old age in relative [peace](#), is honored in [the world](#), and has more-than-enough wealth. In contrast, it is not rare for a righteous person to die early, perhaps following a time of difficult persecution.

One way of understanding these verses involves misjudging both God and the circumstance, which generally results in expounding on what we might consider “normal” self-righteousness. As Ecclesiastes teaches, God is sovereign and rules His creation all the time. So thorough is His care of His creation that His eye is even on sparrows ([Matthew 10:29](#)). Therefore, God is fully aware of any circumstance like that described in verse 15. In fact, He may have directly created it and is using it for His purposes.

The challenge for us, then, is whether we find fault with Him in allowing or arranging this sort of circumstance. Do we even think that God overlooks what any of His children might be going through? It is likely that He *is* directly involved, having caused the circumstance.

Could we be calling God into account, deciding—without knowing all the facts—that what He is overseeing is unfair? Understand, however, that even though He may or may not be directly involved in causing such a circumstance, He is *not* indifferent to human conduct and attitudes whenever or wherever they are. Our judgment must begin with knowing that His governance contains no complacency at any time. Though the righteous may die young, who knows God's entire judgment that lies beyond the grave for either the righteous or the wicked?

In addition, in this world prosperity is frequently associated with some level of evil. God Himself says that He sometimes sets the basest of men on thrones of great power, but He does not mean He favors them in terms of economic prosperity. We should understand those persons are in that position for some good reason, and God is fully aware. The wise person grasps and accepts that God is never out of the picture. He rules!

There is, therefore, a primary lesson about judgment here: Things are not always as they may appear to our narrow perspective. This verse teaches us to be cautious when making judgments about a person's spiritual standing before God and his morality as we might perceive them in his day-to-day surroundings.

This supplies insight into why [Jesus](#) cautions us about judging. The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man contains a clear example of the pitfalls in

making these kinds of judgments. The rich man could easily have been judged as favored by God. But which man was truly favored by Him? It was Lazarus, the beggar, who was the better spiritually.

We should not allow ourselves to jump to self-righteous conclusions about people and to misjudgments about God's involvement. In either case, we are fully capable of raising ourselves spiritually above them. Thus, an overall lesson in these verses is that we must learn to be cautious about accusative thoughts that may arise within us.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Ten\): Paradox](#)

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