



Daily Verse and Comment

Ecclesiastes 7:15-18

(15) I have seen everything in my days of vanity:
There is a just *man* who perishes in his righteousness,
And there is a wicked *man* who prolongs *life* in his wickedness.
(16) Do not be overly righteous,
Nor be overly wise:
Why should you destroy yourself?
(17) Do not be overly wicked,
Nor be foolish:
Why should you die before your time?
(18) *It is* good that you grasp this,
And also not remove your hand from the other;
For he who fears God will escape them all.

New King James Version

Ecclesiastes is written chiefly for the benefit of the converted, for those striving to live an “above the sun” life. The Pharisees were not converted, thus Pharisaical self-righteousness is but a small part of what matters here. Psalm 73 is vital to our understanding of this subject, as it provides us the experience of a converted person.

What [God](#) promises about long life and prosperity will help us see the paradox clearly. [Exodus 20:12](#) says, “Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” [Deuteronomy 5:33](#) adds, “You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.”

“Well with you” points to prosperity. In a relationship with God, it is “normal” to expect these two promises to be fulfilled. Thus, [Ecclesiastes 7:15](#) presents us with a paradox: The obedient neither live long nor are considered prosperous, yet the disobedient live long and are prospered. So, the question arises, why obey God?

The paradox does not always concern wealth. All that is necessary is a situation in which the Christian feels mistreated while the unconverted are being blessed. When this upside-down circumstance continues for some time, the Christian becomes impatient and compares his state with the unconverted.

Christians today are not inoculated against the kind of trial the psalmist endured. We do not always live to a ripe old age; we are not immune to cancer. Sometimes Christians suffer violent accidents. Sometimes their homes are wiped away by a tornado or earthquake, and perhaps they lose a family member. In such times, it is easy to ask, “Where was God?”

One commentator, by using the term “super-righteousness,” helps to clarify Solomon's teaching. To convey the sense of the context as well as the usage of the Hebrew, the King James Version translates the term in verse 16 as “righteous over much.” The New King James Version translates it as “overly righteous.” These translations are vague at best, wherein lies the danger. The commentator, Greidanus, feels that “super-righteousness” conveys Solomon's thought in our modern lingo.

Super-righteousness is a strange and dangerous state because it is a deceptive form of evil. In the next verse, Solomon asks, “Why destroy yourself?” and “Why should you die before your time?” In addition, he states that those who fear God will escape. Each of those phrases indicates some danger exists in the paradox.

How does this super-righteousness arise within a converted person? On the surface, it seems to be a natural effect of the circumstance. Super-righteousness is indeed a form of self-righteousness but not the kind we are

familiar with. It is abnormal in that it develops as a misguided response to the paradox. The danger arises in the subtle-but-risky fruit the response often produces.

In such a paradoxical situation, continuing unabated, most would react by assuming that God is punishing them, reasoning that, if they were not sinning, they would not be experiencing this ordeal. Thus, to relieve the stress, they are likely to recall a scripture like [Matthew 5:48](#): “Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

At that moment, they stand at a fork in the road. The desire to rid themselves of the sore trial sometimes motivates them to choose the wrong path: trying to become more righteous in order to impress God so that He will alter their circumstances.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

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

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