



[Psalm 73:12-14](#)

(12) Behold, these are the wicked, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

(13) Surely I have made my heart pure in vain and washed my hands in innocence,

(14) For all the day long I have been plagued and chastened every morning.

A Faithful Version

Psalm 73:12-14 shows the anguished complaint of the righteous man:

Look at these men of arrogance; they never have to lift a finger—their life is a life of ease; and all the time their riches multiply. Have I been wasting my time? Why take the trouble to be pure? All I get out of it is trouble and woe—every day and all day long. (*The Living Bible*)

The author's distress is evident. At this point, he was clearly puzzled too. How quickly he seemed to have forgotten earlier outpourings of God's benefits. Did he allow his anguish to lead him into believing that he was being picked on unfairly? In this state of mind, a person can easily come to a wrong judgment about how he should respond.

Why would a righteous person believe [God](#) was punishing him? In one sense, it is easy to reach such a conclusion because in our calling we are educated to see [sin](#) in ourselves. Why? If we do not first see our sins, how can we [repent](#) of them? And, if we are not overcoming our sins, how can God be glorified in us?

In addition, at the same time we are also being educated about the [holiness](#) of God. Together, the two of them serve to emphasize how wide the contrast is between Him and us, sharpening our awareness of our sinfulness. How can we possibly live up to that standard? We conclude, then, that we are being punished. The apostle Paul's statement in [Romans 7:24](#) about his own sinfulness seems to confirm our conclusion: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

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However, this is not the end of the story on making this judgment, for it is indisputably unbalanced. We must emphasize and believe another characteristic of God's nature more profoundly. [Exodus 34:4-9](#) records an episode following the Israelites' rebellion after receiving the law at Mount Sinai. [Moses](#) returned to the mountain and asked to [see God](#), that is, literally see Him in person with his own eyes. God granted His request, permitting him to see His back. When God passed by, He proclaimed:

The LORD, the LORD God, [merciful](#) and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in [goodness](#) and [truth](#), keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

God emphasizes His mercy, [patience](#), goodness, truth, and [forgiveness](#). Why do we not think first of His [grace](#) and run to Him, rather than fear His justice, accuse Him, and run from Him? He is our help. He gives us [salvation](#). He provides us with a Savior. He called us and gives us His [Holy Spirit](#), empowering us to learn and grow. He is creating us in His image.

The author of Psalm 73 used this positive insight to come to a better solution. He went to the sanctuary and prayed, and God gave him a balanced, quiet, faithful spirit. The accusations stopped and praise for God began because he could now understand the entire picture in a more sound-minded, less self-centered way.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Eleven\): Paradox, Continued](#)

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