



Daily Verse and Comment

[Ecclesiastes 7:15-22](#)

(15) All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness. (16) Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself ? (17) Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? (18) It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. (19) Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. (20) For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (21) Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: (22) For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

King James Version

A critical element will make [Ecclesiastes 7:15](#) a bit clearer. The Hebrew word translated as “perishes” (*'bad*; *Strong's* #6) creates a misunderstanding. In its strongest sense, if the context calls for it, it can indeed indicate death. Its first definition, though, is simply “to wander.” It can also suggest merely slipping away or declining. Solomon is indeed warning that danger is present, but it is not an emergency situation. Verse 15, then, is saying that the just man is declining in his righteousness, not that he is perishing because he is an evil sinner ignoring a character flaw.

The reality is that he is declining despite being righteous, which makes all the difference in [the world](#). He is not perishing because he is not righteous enough; he simply is not handling a trial well. Punishment from [God](#) is not the issue here, just as it was not the issue with the author of Psalm 73, Job, Paul, or for that matter, Christ, in the midst of their deep trials. However, it is a warning because danger is present.

Job, a righteous man, went through a great trial but not because he was a terrible sinner. [Job 1:1](#) clearly states, “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was *blameless and upright*, and one who *feared God and shunned evil*.” He was clearly not an evil man. However, his friends thought he was hypocritically hiding the fact that he was a sinner. Job did not judge himself as such, so he defended himself—vigorously. Job was correct. When he repented, it was of his lack of understanding, and God accepted it.

As he served God and the church, was Paul being punished through his trials ([II Corinthians 11:22-33](#))? Did [Jesus](#) go through the horrible torture of [the crucifixion](#) and death because He was not righteous enough? He certainly received unjustified and painful punishment, but it was not for His sins but ours. Punishment from God is not the issue in this paradoxical circumstance either. It rarely is the issue with His children, and there are reasons why.

When we are called into God's Family and the church, our lives change radically because God's creative activities intensify. He must prepare us for our change. He has allowed Himself enough time, but He will certainly not waste any of it. Consider that God used Jesus, Job, and Paul, among others, for specific purposes in His great creative program. Their parts included difficult trials that were public enough to witness for God before the world and for us too. This factor will also be active in our lives.

In other words, paradoxical trials like the one described in Psalm 73, are not unusual for us. The stakes are high in our calling. We *must* be tested.

When a person is involved in such a scenario, in reality only three alternatives exist: First, with much prayer and steadfast submission to God's will, he can continue faithfully enduring. Second, he can give up in despair and leave the church. Third, he can strive all the harder to impress God by becoming super-righteous so that He will take notice and bless him for his righteousness, relieving the stress.

It is the third alternative that Solomon addresses in [Ecclesiastes 7:15-22](#), a “solution” that contains an element of danger. We may have lived through such a trial and been delivered, totally unaware of the peril. Super-

righteousness is peculiar and dangerous because it is really a deceptive form of evil.

How does super-righteousness arise within a converted person? On the surface, it actually seems like a natural outcome unless the situation is controlled to prevent it. Though a form of self-righteousness, it is different from the self-righteousness we are more familiar with. It can develop from a resolve to obey God better, but those efforts are allowed to get out of control.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

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

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