



## [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*

Solomon's seemingly simple observation in verse 15 states a potentially serious challenge to the converted. The paradox here describes a “why are these things happening to me?” circumstance. Part of the problem is that, in the context, Solomon gives no specific answers to the dangers posed. He cautions us about the paradox in verses 16-17, but then another question arises: What is the danger or dangers? We dare not misjudge the seriousness of the issues of verse 15.

Psalms 73 provides some explanation, as it presents an event in the life of a godly man that is a near-perfect fit for understanding the paradox. Psalm 73 explores the seriousness of the challenge of discontent combined with envy. If left unresolved, both extreme reactions are dangerous. The issue is not merely a passing trial, for it calls into question God's sense of justice, and the psalmist himself expresses how serious it was—he says his foot almost slipped. As we would say today, he almost left the church.

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Ecclesiastes 7:15-18 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

The psalmist did the right things to receive a solution: He not only endured it, but he actively endured it through prayer. He was not just passively enduring a confounding and confusing thought-pattern. He went into the sanctuary and prayed in [faith](#). [God](#) solved the problem.

Even so, Psalm 73 still does not answer why Solomon so sternly cautions us about the paradox's spiritual dangers. He goes so far as to ask, "Why should you die?" indicating that he perceived the paradox as a serious challenge. He does not mean why should one die at this moment, but rather, why should one die *spiritually*, that is, having lost the opportunity to be in God's Kingdom. Since he does not give much help in the context, we must look for answers elsewhere within the Bible.

The authors of *The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary* catch the essence of the paradox's seriousness to a righteous person. In a rather long analysis of [Ecclesiastes 7:17-18](#), it states:

This is not a caution against aiming at the highest excellence in goodness or wisdom, for these are the proper objects of a righteous ambition. It is rather a caution against the conduct of those who presume to find fault with the methods of God's dealings with men, as if they could devise and conduct a more satisfactory scheme. This is the most daring form of human arrogance. (p. 109)

This warns against the probability that, after first misjudging God's part in the trial, the righteous person will foolishly act on his misjudgment and begin producing its bad fruit. Thus, his second misjudgment is that he will actively attempt to impress God by means of his works.

Three comments drawn from *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes* by Sidney Greidanus, p. 189-191, show the seriousness of turning to super-righteousness to solve the paradox:

- Choon Leong Seow states: "Becoming overly righteous is the hubris that one must avoid. That attitude is the very opposite of the fear of God." Becoming over-righteous is a flaunting rebellion against God's will because, in this case, hubris is not merely a normal, carnal pride but excessive, defiant pride. Why? God has willed that He will save men by His grace. Exhibiting hubris through super-righteousness is saying to God, "I will force You to save me by dint of my works."

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Ecclesiastes 7:15-18 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

- Another commentator, Michael V. Fox comments: “Straining for perfection is presumptuous, a refusal to accept human limitations.” Note Paul’s humility in contrast to this presumptuous hubris: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; I labored more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” ([1 Corinthians 15:10](#)). Paul humbly accepted his limitations, taking no credit whatever.
- Commentator William P. Brown remarks: “A life obsessed with righteousness, in fact, blinds a person to his or her own sinfulness.” His blunt comment gives insight to the trap within super-righteousness: The super-righteous person is so blinded by his conceited efforts that he does not see that his focus is completely on himself.

Each of these comments is a caution not to overlook the serious consequences of misjudging God and the trial. They isolate the danger: a possible mistaken judgment of the circumstance followed by an unthinking reaction to the spiritual and emotional suffering the righteous person is experiencing, emphasizing his own works. Any normal Christian would desire to end his suffering; it is only reasonable. To resolve to do better is also good, but Solomon’s cautions suggest concern for a reaction that will produce bad fruit that are a threat to a person’s salvation.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

**To learn more, see:**

**[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Twelve\): Paradox, Conclusion](#)**

#### **Related Topics:**

[Becoming Overly Righteous](#)

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living Paradox](#)

[Enduring Actively through Prayer](#)

[Focus on Self](#)

[Hubris](#)

[Impressing God with Our Righteousness](#)

[Misjudging God](#)

[Paradox](#)

[Super Righteousness](#)

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Ecclesiastes 7:15-18 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

## [Trying to Impress God](#)

Commentary copyright © 1992-2017 [Church of the Great God](#)  
New King James Version copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)