

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Nineteen)

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I am going to begin this sermon with a brief reminder that the previous sermon was mostly about one particular aspect regarding death (though the sermon touched on other aspects associated with death). I will refer to Hebrew 2:9-15. It is telling us, in summary form, that Christ died for us in order to break the spiritual hold Satan has on us through any fear of eternal death that might remain within us.

The key word is eternal, thus Hebrews 9:27 remains intact as a truth that all must face death. This also means that I Timothy 6:16 remains true. It says that of all humans who have lived and died on earth, only Christ has immortality. Everyone dies the first death; this is the death that Christ's death on our behalf did not redeem us from.

Thus death is going to come upon all regardless of whether we are in Christ when we die; we must, like Christ, be resurrected from that death and that resurrection does not occur until Christ returns. The first death needs to be prepared for through the guidance of God's truth to a proper understanding of it.

This is an important reason why we should be looking into preparations for our death; since we are called, our salvation is on the line. As Peter encourages us to do, we must be making sure our salvation. This is very important for us.

Hopefully I will give you more to fill in some details at the upcoming Feast of Tabernacles—more details regarding death. However if we are redeemed through Christ, we do not die the hopeless second death that those who reject God are held to. By contrast, we are free to voluntarily turn to God through choosing to submit to Him.

The sum of this is to provide us with an awesome gift to be used in life. We do not have to sin in the face of Satan's powers. We are not helpless before the constant influence of a carnal nature that is antagonistic toward God nor to a world that is antagonistic to God.

We may still sin on occasion, but we do not have to submit to Satan's spiritual powers. The key words are, "do not have to." This advantage pays awesome dividends for this way of life because we are equipped with a first line of resistance against the direction he is influencing us to go.

The enslavement is broken. Satan is no longer our father and master. Toward the end of that previous sermon, we read in Revelation 1:18. Jesus Christ states that He holds the power over our lives, and because our minds have been open to these truths, we are free to voluntarily choose to submit to Him.

Someone who is in bondage is a person who is not free to do whatever he wants. Our bondage is to God; we are free to voluntarily submit to Him. The bondage that Satan has held us in is broken, and we have to realize that so that we can make full use of this opening that God has given to us. Brethren, this is just another reason (as I have been saying in these sermons on Ecclesiastes) that **everything** matters.

We must be a thinking people; we must not drift through life day dreaming about what might be, but rather making use of what is given us to make positive use of. We can look forward to an ever growing liberty to obey God with all of our hearts, mind, and all of our soul.

This is the nature of the kind of thoughts that Solomon is encouraging us to be soberly and yet joyfully be filled with, even in the house of mourning that he mentioned earlier in chapter 7, because these realities and their promises are our hope. What this shows us is a measure of the length God was willing to do. He went all the way to giving His own Son to pay the ransom for our liberty and thus giving us freedom to rightly use our free moral agency.

Ecclesiastes 7:5-6 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.

Remember this is a comparison chapter. "This is better than that." So these verses begin another comparison, a contrast between wise and foolish hearts. A wise person will choose to associate with those from whom he can glean knowledge of the great realities that we are involved in because of God's merciful calling.

A true understanding of death is one of these realities but is one that we tend to avoid even seeking out because death is not a happy subject. If given truth will we believe it when the truth is regarding death? Or will we just let it pass saying, "well that is just their opinion." Many people in the world do this.

As in the first comparison (which covers verses 1-4 of this chapter), this comparison contrasts wisdom and foolishness. The first comparison contains an unexpected twist in

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which Solomon claims that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. This comparison says being rebuked is better than receiving praise. A rebuke can tend to be painful because it shows disapproval. We might say that it castigates a person.

One commentary that I did some research in compared a rebuke to a sharp painful stabbing incision. It may even come from a person not highly respected as being wise, but what if they are a messenger of God who has been given insight that is intended for your good? Would we quickly cast out of our minds the rebuke that the person has given to us simply because it was painful, simply because we did not want to hear it from that particular person?

This is very interesting because this is a subject that is touched on quite often in the Bible and especially in the New Testament. In a way it fits right in to Joe Baity's sermonette.

II Samuel 16:5-12 Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. [He did not like David, he hated David.] And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and his left. Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!" Then Abishai the son of the Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" And the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, Curse David. Who then shall say, "Why have you done so?" And David said to Abishai and all of his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him. "It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day."

David said what he did because he grasped the principles that are involved in what Solomon is talking about here in Ecclesiastes 7. Let us say that a person hurts your feelings. They rebuke you in some way. Maybe it is a rebuke from somebody within the congregation, somebody that you would never dream would rebuke you, correct you,

and castigate you for what you said or what you did or maybe it is to another person. Now should that person who brought the rebuke be considered evil and shunned? Or worse yet retaliated against with harsh justification, defending oneself? Do you not find that if somebody corrects you...if that correction is strong enough to be a rebuke to you, does your blood not rise and your temper begin to rise? Do you not feel like you need to retaliate or come back and say, "I saw you do that. Who are you to rebuke me?" Did David do that?

David's reaction was to consider that maybe the Lord sent him to rebuke him; maybe the Lord sent him to rebuke him to test him in order to see what the reaction would be. Sometimes we are rebuked very strongly. If indeed that rebuke is coming from the Lord...in that case the rebuke actually induces healing, even though it is painful.

I want you to think beyond David, to Jesus. Here is a man who from the time that He was a child, I am sure, was already beginning to receive persecution of some sort. By the time that He was a preaching man, His first sermon recorded took place in His home town in Nazareth on the Sabbath day. At the end of that sermon, He told those people, "On this day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears." Those people rebuked Him and tried to throw Him off a mountain; somehow God enabled Him to escape.

I have gone into this because He was receiving accusations and rebukes all of His life. He was being challenged because the truth that He was preaching to those people were indeed truths, but they could not accept them. In a way, His sermons were a rebuke to them to bring them to repentance. They had no right to do what they did to Him—rebuking and persecuting Him—because everything that He did was correct, honest, and truthful. Yet Jesus never retaliated in any kind. Is that an example or what?

You can read what He did. There were times that He corrected what they said, but He always did it in a quiet composed way without accusing them of being evil, even though they were evil. There is our example. Jesus calmly replied to their stabs at His message and His character.

In this series of verses, wisdom lies in accepting the rebuke (maybe we can say correction if we want to soften it a bit). Maybe the person is telling us, not because they care, but because the person is a messenger from God, and he is correcting something that we never saw in our lives. By 'saw' I mean grasp the meaning of. It has to be explained to us, like with a mallet—something that will be painful.

The wisdom lies in being able and taking, accepting, the rebuke. This is besides the actual correction we are getting. The foolishness in this area lies in accepting what

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Solomon calls the song of fools—commonly held lies. This comparison is, I believe, more easily understood than the comparisons that are covered in verses 1-4 (the ones between birth, death, mourning, and mirth), but that does not mean that it is easier to humble oneself and accept the rebuke.

Now grasping this truth that I have just given to you in words is easier than actually accepting the rebuke and changing. In Proverb 9:7-8 where Solomon wrote this,

Proverbs 9:7-8 He who reproves a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man gets himself a blemish. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you: Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

Consider what this is saying and put it into the context of Ecclesiastes 7:5-6 where it says the real challenge is in being willing to accept the rebuke without retaliation, just accepting it for what the person is saying. What the person is saying may not be true at all, but you calmly accept it without retaliation. That is what Jesus did.

What is going to happen if in receiving a rebuke we retaliate in a carnal way? Verse 7 tells us that “he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself.” That is really interesting. If you retaliate, it is highly likely that the situation between the two people is going to intensify; that is what we want to avoid. In verse 8 it says, “Do not correct a scoffer lest he hate you.” Here is a contrast now. “Rebuke a wise man and he will love you,” because he realizes that he has gained. It may have been embarrassing, but he realizes that he has gained by accepting the correction.

The reason accepting a rebuke is so difficult is because our stubborn “know it all” pride is severely damaged by being called into account.

No blood shows when one’s pride is being penetrated, but one’s self-esteem might be severely flattened for a while. Retaliation upon being rebuked is a sure sign of character weakness. Remember the strongest character personality who ever lived was Jesus. He never retaliated, and you can note this truth all the way to His death—a painful, shameful death, in which the Sanhedrin and the Romans, to some degree, were rebuking Him for being the king of truth. He never retaliated, never tried to get even. He let His works speak for what His character was, and He accepted it.

Thus it is almost a sure thing that upon receiving the rebuke, because our pride is damaged, we feel really motivated to justify ourselves. This very often results in accusations being made against the one who rebuked us, and perhaps the rebuttal that

we might give that person is filled with a lot of name calling in order to put the rebuker down.

The illustrations that are used by Solomon in these verses are really vivid. He uses the term “song of fools”—the laughter of fools, the crackling of thorns under a pot. The key illustration is the crackling of thorns under a pot which describes a lack of good effect. As we will see, that phrase seems to indicate council or advice in the rebuke which is all show and no profit, something that is all noise with no lasting good, something that is all flame. But it does not last long enough to produce heat; something that is more emotional than substantive; something more appealing but less profitable; something giving only temporary relief at best, but in the long run is no help at all.

The song of fools may be advice that sounds pleasant like a happy song delivered by flattering companions promising uplifting help but failing to deliver; because like all songs their council comes to an end without really changing anything for the better. That is the way songs are. They are over and then what? We just go on to the next one; we are lifted for a little while, but it really does not last for very long, and perhaps it may even leave loss or wickedness in its lingering strains because some songs are pretty painful, joyless.

The joy of fools, as verse 6 mentions, may be referring to a lack of serious understanding of the long range consequences involved in sinful advice. This is important. People give advice, and all too often that advice may seem as though it is fitting at the time, but in the long run it is not really good advice. It is none-the-less easy to accept council that may at first produce seemingly well; it blazes up in enjoyment or profit, like it were a thorn under a pot, but it is short lived and it diminishes.

I do not know whether you understand what you are looking at there or listening to, but that advice that Solomon gives is an alternative way of saying that there is a way that seems right, but in the end it is the way of death.

If one is counseled “Go ahead and have fun when you are young, and nobody will ever notice a year from now; they will not even remember what you did or did not do.” Watch out! That moment of joy might just be a death trap. Be wary.

This comparison has to do with one’s overall attitude toward the acceptance or rejection of the wisdom contained within a rebuke. Now accepting being rebuked as David did sometimes requires more humility than we have; when that occurs our pride then forces us to reject even very good advice. All too often a rebuke is submitted to only because of the authority of the person correcting.

This is clearly seen with children or we might say with the immature. They yield to the correction only because there is no alternative, but they do so grumbling, and all the while they do the task your way rather than theirs. When they do something wrong, they are rebuked and corrected, and they go to according to what you have instructed because you are the boss. They do it that way, but they are not in agreement; and when your back is turned, they go back to doing it the way they did before because that is what they are comfortable with even though it is not correct.

We will turn to Psalms 141 because it is likely that Solomon learned what it says in those two verses from his father David.

Psalms 141:5 Let the righteous strike me, [stronger than a rebuke] it shall be a kindness. [kindness to be corrected by somebody who is righteous] And let him reprove me; it shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it, for still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.

Is it possible that Solomon learned that principle that appears there in Ecclesiastes 7 from his father? It is almost exactly what his father counseled, here. What David says is truly an expression of a righteous person who, upon receiving a rebuke from a wise person, compares it to receiving joy from such discipline and also receives it as a gift of love.

The love in the verse (Psalms 141:5) translated kindness comes from the Hebrew word *cheched*. Kindness is an expression of caring concern. If the rebuke is above all honest, even though it hurts when we receive it and we recognize that what the person is telling us is true, then it is still caring concern that is coming from the lips of the person who rebukes us. It is kindness, even though painful.

The mention of oil in the verse suggests an anointing of the holy spirit, and this corresponds perfectly with another verse here, in Proverbs 9:9.

Proverbs 9:9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

Even if the correction or rebuke is painful (and he does not like it because his pride in his own workmanship, his pride in his rightness is damaged), he none-the-less accepts it and goes on.

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Solomon is saying then if we will allow it, a wise person's rebuke will accomplish far more in our lives than the flattery of fools.

Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, And a bribe debases the heart.

This carries the lesson in this comparison, one step further—the comparison of course being that it is better to accept the rebuke—but it carries it one step further. It even appears to pick up again on an aspect of Psalm 141:5-6. In both cases—Ecclesiastes 7:7 and Psalm 141:5-6—it is as though the theme shifts to a bit later time when David is in the presence of influential people.

He continues the thought spot on, and it coordinates with verse 7. These people are attempting to persuade David with flattering offers that are nothing short of bribes. Remember David was the king; if you wanted to get something done in your nation, you went to the king to seek permission from him and from his councilors, but along the way they offer advice or council that is nothing short of attempting to bribe David.

You can read that David rejects it. So David remembers the wise rebuke that verse 5-6 covers, and he rejects their godless proposals. It appears, when comparing both accounts, Solomon also remembered and thus he passed on that wisdom to you and me.

Briefly apply all of this to the matter of death that appears earlier in the chapter, most especially Solomon's conclusion that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. Consider this: if one is in this world and is told the biblical truth regarding death and immortality, what are the chances that they will accept it or reject it.

The wise may tell them things that are sharply critical of their presently held common belief. What do most people in the world already believe regarding death? It is that they are immortal and that at death they are going to pass into another realm. Thus most specifically they believe that a human being is by nature immortal. The fact is that one does not go off to heaven following death to be forever with the Lord, as they might reason, or conversely go to an ever burning hell and be endlessly tortured. But, which version are they going to believe? The truth: that at death one simply goes into the grave and awaits a resurrection or that at death their body goes into the grave and they either go to heaven or to hell? One is easier to take; the other might require a very serious change of mind, a very serious change of behavior, in their life.

Why do they not want to change? There are reasons. In order to better to understand a couple of principles contained in these comparisons, one has to remember that Ecclesiastes is first of all written by God through Solomon for converted people. It is not for the world. This is written to converted people.

Second, seeking and grasping understanding from what he is saying here has to be sought and grasped from the eternity God is working toward rather than the shortness of life we are more accustomed to dealing with humanly.

That is an important principle because we have to learn to see things from God's point of view and to know that He is always truthful, factual, realistic in what He says to us. If we are learning that and making use of it, we are going to have a better grasp of why Solomon says what he is saying.

How can a correct and sharp rebuke that may bring strong public embarrassment and possibly damage to ones reputation in the eyes of the public be a loving gift from the righteous and a gain to one's life? Another way of asking this: how can death be perceived as a gain? God says that. How can death be perceived as a gain and thus be better than the day of one's birth?

We have to look at this advice that Solomon is giving us from God's point of view. It is written to His converted children. We are to accept it as truth and continue to work on understanding and grasping it...from God's point of view.

In order to catch the real sense of this, it must be looked at through the eyes of God and His purposes, not through the ways that one would normally perceive these subjects. We will use Paul as an example—what he says about himself and the trying circumstances that he went through. In this circumstance (one that you are quite familiar with), he was rebuked soundly by Jesus Christ. He accepted the correction despite the embarrassment.

Would you not expect that his meeting of that challenge (of accepting the rebuke from Jesus Christ) would result in his life suddenly blossoming to the place where everything would come up smelling roses, where he would be happy and everybody would just say, "Is Paul not great?"

Did they do that with Jesus and all of the truth that He had? Do you not think that somebody who is as devoted a disciple as Paul was to Jesus...that it is very likely that the very thing that happened to Jesus is also going to happen to Paul and to his reputation—that in terms of the public's eye, His reputation would go down rather than

up? That is exactly what happened.

I am going into this so that you will understand that just because we have been called, have God's Spirit, are becoming like Jesus Christ that we would not expect that everything would come up roses. That is the way the carnal mind thinks. But God has given us a converted mind, and He has shown us that it is probably not going to be that way. It going to be far different than the way that we would like it to be.

We will build a case here. This is one of the reasons why accepting a rebuke even as a converted person is not easy; it does not produce the joy that we might think that it would.

I Corinthians 15:9-12 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

We have this from Paul's own mouth; he persecuted the Church. Of course he was rebuked for what he did. In Acts 8 we will continue to build this example from Paul's life. Accepting correction from God is not necessarily going to produce an easier life.

Acts 8:1-3 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Acts 9:1-6 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said "who are You Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads"

Here is the vivid history, Paul says, of a powerful rebuke from a wise person. What is he going to do? He accepted the correction; we know he did that. Now in II Corinthians 11 to help us to see, again from God's point of view, what resulted from what Saul did.

II Corinthians 11:16 I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.

He is comparing himself to what resulted from his accepting the rebuke from Jesus Christ, and he is using his confrontation, his experience with the false minister as an example

II Corinthians 11:22-23 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool [he would not be a minister of Christ if he did not accept the rebuke, but he did]. I am more in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

He accepted the rebuke and in the one sense, at least physically, his life got worse. I am doing this because we have to see God's advice from God's point of view. He wants us to be informed; He wants us to know the truth—just because He rebukes us, calls us, and we respond to the rebuke does not necessarily mean that our life is going to get physically better.

Judging by Paul's life—merely observing what appears on the surface—accepting the rebuke does not appear to have been wisdom. The rebuke from a wise person never stopped. In the chapter in which he requested to be healed and it was denied to him...would you not say that God's refusal to heal him was a rebuke? It could be understood that way. God said no.

Think of your own children. If they want to do something and you say no, for whatever reason, (because of your superior experience and understanding; you know that it is not good for the child to be given permission to do that) what does the child do? They say,

“You never let me do anything that is fun.” That is a natural carnal reaction.

Jesus Christ said no to Paul regarding a healing that he very much wanted, and he wanted it seemingly for a good reason. He would be better able to carry out his responsibilities if he felt as though he was in good health. But Jesus said, “No.” He rebuked him. God did it for reasons that were beyond Paul's physical understanding, but he understood spiritually.

Things never got better for Paul even from this time, here. We will go to the book of Philippians. I really want us to understand this because I fear as we are hearing from every side that conditions in the world are not going to improve. They are going to continue to go downhill, especially regardless of whether we live in Israelitish countries. God has taken the wall of protection away from the Israelitish countries and things are not going to go back to the way they were. We can look back and say it was better then, but we have to question that to. Was it really? We find the apostle Paul in prison in Philippians 1. What is a preacher going to do if he is in prison? God had him write four epistles; he made good use of it.

Philippians 1:12-22 But I want you to know brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. [God had other thoughts in mind. Humanly we might say, “I am all penned up here. I cannot do anything. I am not out on the street corner preaching. I am not in a rented hall preaching. I am not doing my job baptizing people.” But Paul who had a great deal more experience at looking at things from God's point of view could see that he was being cautious.] So that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains are much more bold to speak the word without fear. [God was showing Paul that he was not needed out on the streets; there are other people to do the job.] Some indeed preached Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will. The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely supposing to add affliction to my chains; But the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain [the end is better than the beginning]. But if I live on

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in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor, yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

Can you understand why what I said that everything in the book of Ecclesiastes has to be understood first of all as being counsel delivered by God through Solomon to God's own children? It is for His children not for the world.

Second, we have to understand that the advice, the counsel, for wisdom comes from Him, from His point of view not ours. That is why Paul had this attitude, even though he was severely rebuked from what he was doing to the church. He recovered. And from the time that he was able to come to know God through Jesus Christ, he understood that whatever God was having him do was the best thing for Paul to be doing at that time. This was true even when he was in jail and would have liked to be out. We might think, carnally, we know what is best for us, but from God's point of view, it is not what is best for us. Do we really believe that God is involved? That is the point in this whole thing.

Whether the rebuke comes directly from God, whether it comes from God through a minister, or whether it comes from God through another church member who is also converted but has kindness enough to rebuke—that person is the messenger from God not from Satan.

The world does not have this advantage; they are restrained by the bondage that Satan the devil has on them and their carnal mind and carnal way. What is important for us to see is that regardless of the way things worked out, Paul's attitude was to gladly accept the good regarding how Christ was being and would continue to be magnified by what happened to Paul, even to the point of Paul being unjustly put to death by the Emperor's judgment.

Here in the book of Philippians, Paul was not put to death. We know from history that Paul was released for a short period of time; then he was jailed again and this time he lost his head. It is not recorded in the Bible, but tradition says that he was beheaded on the Appian way just outside of the city of Rome. So his work was done, and that is the way that God chose to end it.

We will collect these thoughts in our mind because I want to look at something that I think is important; again our faith in God is an important aspect of this conclusion. When Paul went through this rebuke especially, his reputation as a man suffered greatly; even the people in the church were afraid of him. They did not want him coming to their

meetings, to their assemblies. They were afraid of him, and it took Barnabas to break down the resistance of the people who were concerned about the apostle Paul attending with them.

The church accepted him through the help of God because they began to see that this man truly is converted. He is gifted in his teaching. They understood that he was really, because of his conversion, a man of very fine character; he was humble and upright in every way.

Did Paul's reputation with the world suffer as a result of what he went through? Remember Paul went through this at the will of God, as part of the will of God. He did it willingly, you can be sure, because of what is written in the book of Acts (when Paul was converted and the church eventually accepted him). But the Jews did not accept him, and he became an object of their persecution—the tables turned one hundred and eighty degrees.

Two thousand years has gone by. Now I want you to ask this question of yourself. What is Paul's reputation today? Billions and billions of people have come in contact with the things that Paul said, that Paul wrote; he helped to establish traditions within the church. I think that you will agree with me that the apostle Paul as well as the other apostles that Jesus selected as that original group of Christians (those who were the foundation with the prophets of the Church), those people's reputations have not diminished in the least.

Now the world in general has had the apostle Paul preach to them. Everybody who is at least somewhat familiar with the Bible all through the years for almost two thousand years now has been preached to, even though the apostle Paul is dead. He along with the other apostles. I believe that those billions of people will tell you that never has there been a group of teachers with a better message and reputation than those people.

It seemed bad at first. But, you see, in death their reputation have actually become greater. Do you see what I am getting at here? The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. What God blessed those apostles with He is also going to bless us with. Our reputations are going to be favored and increased though we are in the grave because of the life that we lived while we were a servant of Jesus Christ.

He is going to rebuke us, just like He did the apostle Paul, and so we find from God again that if we look at this through God's eyes, then we can begin to understand that. Because God is involved, what He had Solomon write here in the book of Ecclesiastes is absolutely true. The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Nineteen) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

In addition to that, receiving rebukes, especially if that rebuke is from God, His Son Jesus Christ, what the apostles write in His word, or what a minister of God might tell you in a sermon is in this book...being rebuked by the truth of God is going to end up making your death better and the day of your death is going to be enhanced by that.

It seems like it is backwards from what it ought to be, and the one that turns it aright is our Lord and Savior. So trust in Him.