

## STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES (29)

### Trying To Figure It Out

#### Ecclesiastes 8:10-17

Having addressed religious leaders and their followers, we now turn to another group of verses that deal some things that confound us.

We sometimes hear people say, "Life is not fair." And from a worldly perspective that is absolutely true. It is one of reasons the pursuits of this life is vanity. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:19 (in the context of resurrection), "*If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most pitiable*". We find in our text some observations that even Solomon with all his wisdom did not fully understand why, and neither do we. So let us notice a few of these observations.

#### I. **The wicked buried and forgotten (10)**

- a. This is a challenging verse with varied explanations, but here is a consideration.
- b. All will die as has been noted, both the good and the wicked. – that is known and true. Solomon throughout this book has observed that as one reason this life is vanity. And in our next section (9:1-12), he addresses it again, in this context.
- c. BUT there are times when the wicked receive a decent burial and are treated as if they were good and with dignity. Realize that often in Biblical history (and even in more modern history), after wars (fighting enemies) or the execution of criminals, they were not given an honorable burial – but were either thrown in mass graves, unmarked graves, pauper's fields or even left to rot with no burial at all, sometimes as a message that one's life was worthless.  
Solomon's observation could have been, that there is one who is wicked, but he receives an honorable burial as if he were NOT wicked. How often do we find those who have lived evil lives, but in death they are treated as if they were the most wonderful of saints? Suddenly, all their wickedness evaporates, and they are now "singing with the angels". How many preachers, preach the lost (they know they were not righteous) into heaven?  
While I am not the judge, and I believe a body should be treated with dignity (which shows the sacredness of life), I know better than to put myself in the place of God with such.
- d. Solomon then notes that these wicked die, they are usually quickly forgotten, even in the city where they carried out their wickedness.  
CONSIDER THIS: While some may know of their wickedness (and perhaps the damage they did), how quickly do we forget about their wickedness and fail to learn from it? As the expression goes, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."  
Consider Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:6ff – all these things became our examples. The Bible warns us to learn from history, not just our personal history, but what has happened in times past. If we do, we can be better. If not, BEWARE!

#### II. **When we delay punishment (11)**

- a. This is a frustration, but it is so true. When we fail to deal swiftly and sternly with wickedness, we are setting ourselves up for more wickedness.
- b. And I believe this is one of the problems with our society. We are living in times when so much bad behavior is ignored, defended, rewarded and even praised in some instances. And as we are seeing, it is NOT making our country or our communities any better. In most cases, they become worse.  
God ordained and expects governments to deal justly and with the wicked. Romans 13:3 tells us that *rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil*. Vs. 4 says, *For he is God's minister to you for good*.

*But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.* This is what God INTENDS for government to do! 1 Peter 2:13-14 tell us the king and governors are "*sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.*"

A wicked government is one that calls good evil, and evil good (Isaiah 5:20). The point is – it WILL NOT LAST! It will destroy a society or nation.

Why? "*Therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*" This world is designed so that it can only tolerate so much evil.

- c. When all one gets is a "slap on the wrist" (or completely ignored or even justified) for wrongdoing, what is there to keep them from continuing to do their wickedness? Often it leads to even worse.
- d. NOTE: Overall, one of the reasons I believe we see so much wickedness today is because God's wrath is rarely carried out immediately. Imagine if what happened in Acts 5 to Ananias and Saphira (or Nadab and Abihu, or Uzzah) happened all the time (Acts 5:1-11).

Of course, God has a reason – He is longsuffering and not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). His patience is our hope.

BUT we also know that in the end, He WILL justly address this (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

Nevertheless, He has entrusted US with the responsibility of praising good and punishing wickedness – whether in society, in the home or in the church. Think about that. A failure in any of these areas will result in the same thing – more evil.

### III. There will be a day of reckoning (12-13)

- a. These verse show where Solomon finds some comfort – He knows:
- b. ***In this life, the wicked may prosper and even prolongs his days*** (it happens). We see evil around and those at the forefront get away with it and in some instances they even thrive.
- c. But in the end, WHO is the one that we be ok?  
Solomon notes, (He ***knows***, not thinks or hopes) "***It will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him***" (or openly – NASB). God KNOWS what is going on and in the end will take care of the godly, those who fear Him (2 Thessalonians 1:7).
- d. The wicked will NOT escape the wrath of God. "***It will NOT be well with the wicked***". His evil prosperity will NOT last forever.
- e. Consider how the good and evil are contrasted. The good "fear Him" even openly – they tremble at His presence and realize there is a day of accounting. They know He is watching and does not forget! On the other hand, the wicked are NOT afraid of God – as Paul noted in Romans 3:18 (at the end of a series of quotes from the Old Testament establishing that all are sinners – vs. 10-18).  
Remember Solomon's conclusion to this letter – the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13-14)

### IV. The vanity of inequity (14-15)

- a. Continuing his observations related to the previous verses, he describes "a vanity which occurs on the earth."
- b. ***Sometimes the just suffer as the wicked should be dealt with***. We see all sorts of suffering – the drunk driver that kills or maims, the rapist and murderer, the one who steals your identity and is never caught, wicked leaders who impose wicked laws and the righteous suffer. I would be reminded of numerous passages in the NT which remind us that as the righteous we are going to suffer (2 Timothy 3:12). 1 Peter 4:12-13 says not to think it strange when you face fiery trials but rejoice instead.
- c. ***Sometimes the wicked prosper as it should be for the righteous***. Opposite of point b.
- d. ***Therefore, enjoy your life while you can*** (15) – Solomon "commended" or recommended enjoyment with whatever you have. Solomon is saying you make the best of your situation no matter what it is

(like Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi - Acts 16:25, or Joseph whether in Potiphar's house or in prison, rose to the occasion and made the best of it, etc.).

**V. Ultimate, you CANNOT find out the work of God (16-17)**

a. Vs. 16, ***you can think about what is wrong all day long, even dwell on it to the point of losing sleep.*** But what does it accomplish? I'm reminded of Jesus telling us not to worry, because God knows what you need (Matthew 6:24-34). NEVER forget that He is in control.

b. Vs. 17, AND understand that ***you cannot figure out the work of God*** (except what He chooses to reveal to you – 1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

God is still in control and YOU AND I cannot predict the future with certainty. All we can do is make educated and wise guesses as to what is supposed to happen. But always do with the understanding that His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8). Isaiah 40:13 says, *"Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him."*

Romans 9:20 - be careful before questioning God., 11:33-36 – His wisdom and judgments are past finding out.

At ANY moment, the wicked who are prospering can be brought to nothing, and the righteous can be justified (consider the example of Mordecai and Esther).

The wise man realizes he is NOT in control of this world and acts accordingly. 2 Corinthians 5:7, *"For we walk by faith, not by sight."*

Friends, in this life there are things we don't know, and some things we will never know. But the wise man accepts this and puts his trust in the only one who really DOES know all things. That wisdom can help you deal with the inequities of this life. Think about it!