

Ecc1. 7:15-29, The Perils and Profits of Godliness
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A. 7:15-19 A Puzzle

1. Overall Structure--skip 16-17 for now.
 - a) 15 observes the "unorthodox" suffering of the righteous and prosperity of the wicked.
 - b) 18-19 presents the orthodox teaching, that the one who fears God and the wise man will prosper.

2. Other examples of this pattern:

15, 18-19 are an example of a pattern seen elsewhere: though the wicked appear to prosper (wp) and the righteous to suffer (rs), yet from the DIVINE PERSPECTIVE the righteous prosper (RP) and the wicked suffer (WS). All four elements are not always present.

 - a) 7:15-18
In fact, we will see that 16 and 17 are both WS.
 - 1) 15a, rs
 - 2) 15b, wp
 - 3) 18-19, RP

 - b) 8:12-14
 - 1) 12a, wp
 - 2) 12b, RP
 - 3) 13, WS
 - 4) 14a, rs
 - 5) 14b, wp

 - c) Job 21:7-26
 - 1) 7-15, wp
 - 2) 16-26, WS

 - d) Ps. 73:3-20
 - 1) 3-9, wp
 - 2) 10-11, rs
 - 3) 12, wp
 - 4) 13-15, rs
 - 5) 16-20, WS
 - 6) 21-26, RP
 - 7) 27, WS
 - 8) 28, RP

 - e) These, especially the last, suggest that the resolution is to be found in one's perspective (the temple). From the perspective of eternity, the righteous *do* win and the wicked *do* lose, though what we can see in our daily experience may be quite different.

3. Problems in the passage: 16-17 .
 - a) Correct the translation: not "too," but "very."
 - b) These verses are puzzling. In the light of 15, we should have

expected 16 ("Don't be very righteous") but not 17; in the light of 18 we should have expected 17 ("Don't be very wicked") but not 16.

B. 7:20-24, What he Did Not Find

1. 20-22, Righteousness
 - a) 20: "Surely" there is no righteous man.
 - b) 21-22, Evidence.
 - 1) 21, Don't listen to what people say, or you'll hear some pretty unflattering things about yourself. So you aren't perfect.
 - 2) 22, You have condemned others, showing that they aren't perfect, either.
2. 23-24, Wisdom
 - a) 23, It is inaccessible.
 - b) 24, In fact, everything that is, is inaccessible to man's mind. We can know only the outer fringes.

C. 7:25-29, What he Did Find

1. 25, the Quest

In order to test the last set of conclusions (there is no righteousness or wisdom among men), Qohelet sought for two things:

 - a) Wisdom and reckoning--looking for good things.
 - b) "Wickedness is folly, and foolishness is madness."--bad things.
 - c) NB: Most people look only for one or the other. Qohelet is being balanced.
2. 26-29, the Conclusions

These progress in successive generalizations, from a specific observation about women, to a more general one about men and women, to the most specific one about mankind.

 - a) Woman, 26

Not every woman, but a woman who ensnares and entraps a man.

 - 1) There is a physical side to this. Notably, where Victorian England focused more on guilt of the man who seduced an innocent maiden, the biblical picture is of the alluring woman who leads men astray.
 - 2) The main context here has to do with wisdom and righteousness in general, not physical chastity. Suggests that he is looking at a woman who dominates her man.
 - a> Eve with Adam.
 - b> Jezebel with Ahab, 1 Kings 21:25
 - c> 1 Tim. 2:12-15, women warned against domineering over men. This passage implies that women, because of their more emotional nature, are more liable to fall into error than are men.

d> The underlying dynamic is that a man naturally wants to please his wife, and will do to please her even what he knows is wrong. Brothers, recognize this tendency, and be careful to search out matters on your own. Don't rely on your wife's intuitions. Sisters, be sure you let God deal with your husbands, and don't try to take his place. Families, if it is the wife rather than the father who is the dominant spiritual influence and direction-setter, watch out!

b) Men and women, 27-28

- 1) Virtuous man is a rarity.
- 2) Virtuous woman is even rarer.

c) Mankind, 29

- 1) Righteousness comes from God.
- 2) What man produces is "inventions," man-made ideas that look good and sound righteous but are displeasing to God.
- 3) Fits precisely with the full biblical revelation about justification, that man can produce only wickedness, and righteousness comes only from God!
 - a> Isa. 64:6
 - b> Tit. 3:5ff
 - c> Rom. 4:19-24
 - d> Phil. 3:4-11

D. Resolution to the Puzzles of vv.16-17.

1. *Don't* be very wicked. You can't help some of it--it comes with the race! But restrain it all you can.
2. *Don't* be very righteous, since the only kind of righteousness you can put forth is works righteousness, self-righteousness, which merits God's judgment just as much as wickedness does.
3. *Do* recognize that whatever the lot of God's people and his enemies appears to be in this life, when you view matters from the temple, it does pay to serve God.