

Topic	The Paradox of Life
Reference	Ecclesiastes 6:10 – 7:14
Date	09 July 2017
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What is a Paradox?

A statement that appearing on the surface to be contradictory or impossible, but is actually a truth.

The ultimate paradox of churches filled with people who say they come to the saving knowledge of God, they say they know God but if they are honest with themselves they still haven't found what they are looking for. Today we are going to look at this paradox. Life is a series of contradictions and the Ecclesiastes writers starts off with this very profound looking at life.

Ecclesiastes 7:15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

The first thing we are going to ask ourselves is how do we define wisdom?

We have a kind of wordily view of wisdom. So some people go into this insecurity; I don't know my bible, I don't have a Ph.D., I am not an MD of a company I am just a clerk, I am not so smart but here is the good news of the Bible. Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs is tied to another word called righteousness. Meaning as we try to be righteous in lives God is telling you don't be stupid, and very often Christians don't tie the two together. When Jesus was sending out his disciples he told the disciples be innocent as a dove that is righteousness, the second part was be wise as a serpent that is wisdom. So we need to have those two together. If the two don't go intact together they have actually no meaning and the world today has a lot of righteous people who make a lot of stupid mistakes. A lot of people have conviction of their righteousness. Some people think the church should run the way like they want and if you don't follow their definition of church you are not righteous.

16 Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise-why destroy yourself?

17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool- why die before your time?

The teacher is telling you that don't be over-righteous, don't be over-wicked. What does this mean? This is a response to this paradox. The teacher is telling us that he has observed the world and he said the world is unfair. The world does not make sense, now that is something every one of us relates to, whether you are in it or not at one point you look out there and you know there is something completely wrong with the world.

The teacher is taking it on how we respond to it. That means you realize that it is true it drives you to two extreme responses. The teacher is telling us that everyone of us is one of this two or in the danger of being one of these two. You are sitting here either being over-righteous or you are sitting here being over-wicked that is the context of that meaning.

We try to make a deal with God. At your unconscious level your theology ends up this way. the temptation of being righteous in an unrighteous world is to believe your righteousness earns you a longer and more prosperous life and I will tell you 99% of Christians have this. Pharisees also had this. Matthew told in Mathew 23, you strain out a man but you keep the camel. Why is it every time when things go bad we always say why God why me. By saying this we say that I don't deserve it because I did a, b, c, d for the church and because of my righteousness God I don't deserve it.

The teacher is saying something very profound, your actions tell you that and once your action tells you that your righteousness is being defined by looking at the world and hoping to do good deeds and hoping that God will prolong your life and this kind of righteousness centers on self and there are two extremes

1. It comes from a deep insecurity.
2. From a self-centered self-competence.

They are two sides of the same coin and very often we will oscillate between the two.

Finding Balance from Both Extremes:

The verse uses the word "Fear God". So if you say the man who fears God, anyone who fear God doesn't sin a little bit. Again the context comes out because he has seen a righteous man perishing in righteousness, a wicked man living long in his wickedness that his paradox. Meaning life is not fair and he is saying, why bother. When you are sinning deliberately. The teacher ties that with foolishness because it is completely idiotic to come to church and say you can get away with that, that makes you and I stupid.

Just because you are here in the church once a Sunday, put money in the bag, listen a little bit, try not to fall to sleep doesn't make you a Christian. I will tell you it is wiser for you to go out there and play golf on a good Sunday morning, it is true because you are wasting your time. You are either in or out but don't come every Sunday for two hours and think that kind of religiosity is going to save you, it is completely foolishness and in the context of Ecclesiastes it comes out because you can't make sense of this world, you are scared, you are trying to buy some insurance and that's foolishness. So finding balance and he says the man who fears God will avoid all extremes. It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other.

No matter how much righteousness you do you are going to sin that is what the teacher is trying to tell us and if you are going to be righteous forget about being righteous and prolonging your

life I've got something planned better for you. This righteousness will get you an eternal life and this righteousness will let you know what even though you fall in sin this righteousness saves you and the simple way of finding balance is the cross, because it is the righteousness that comes from God. It is a righteousness of grace. The righteousness that tells us that I serve, I have no right to say God take pity on me. God is under no obligation. Serving in church has the danger of self-righteousness, the more you do you go and tell everybody I am very busy with the church. This is self-righteous and I struggle with that but it is the righteousness from the cross, everything I do the moment I think my work has done something good for me it becomes a righteousness from man.

Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city.

Ten is symbolic, meaning perfection. Meaning it is a big city and they are trying to tell you, you have the potential even though you are not influential this is your God given potential, you have a bit of wisdom, wisdom is very potent. Chapter 7 talks a lot about this. Then he anchors it, he says,

There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

It is almost a counter balance. Then he says this.

Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you- for you know in your heart, that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Another thing that wisdom is tied with in chapter 7 is surprisingly not the mind but the heart. The teacher is tying the mind and the heart in wisdom because this is in the area we tend to often overlook. We would say that the mind has to control the heart, but what you don't realize is how subtle the heart is going to ensnare you and he picks it up in verse 26 when he says the sinner she will ensnare.

The paradox of trying to know everything but not knowing yourself.

Most of us don't know ourselves and the way to know yourself is to know something very simple which chapter 7 picks up again and again, what motivates your actions.

Peter Scazzero wrote in his book "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" and he says that all of us are like an ice berg. I look at you; you look at me you get an impression. What you and I don't realize is what goes underneath the surface and this is a very well-known analogy, meaning the iceberg on top is very much determined by what lies beneath the surface. So what I say, what I do, my mind would tell you this is what I am doing it but if check the heart which is what chapter 7 is doing you find your motives are not so straight. Here is a simple example just from that verse itself.

Why is it you want to hear what people say?

Verse 21, do not pay attention to every word people say.

Why, you might think that it is your job to know. Actually that is not true, you probably want to hear because you want to hear praises. Why do you want to hear praises? Because you are insecure. What people say matters to you. Peter Scazzero puts it this way. The gospel requires you to know yourself to know God and you find this in the New Testament. You see this in the beatitudes. The beginning of the beatitudes is blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Meaning, you recognize your sins, you name them and then blessed are those who mourn, you got to be specific and again Paul does this in Ephesians when he says pull out the old self, put on a new self, live because the days are wicked, be wise. You to put off your old self means you got to know your particular sins.

So here is a question to all of us. If I ask you to take a piece of paper and write down your sins and how they affect your behavior would you be able to do it. It is not easy to see the faults in ourselves.

When we are negative it makes us critical. When we are arguing we are too proud to admit that we are wrong. Chapter 7, 8 and 9 unpacks a lot of this and Peter Scazzero says beneath this it comes with your belief system. Your Christianity and how your Christianity your faith deals with your emotions and lot of this theme from very far-far back and the psalmist says in Psalm 139

Search me O God and know my heart, test me O Lord and know my anxious thoughts.

There is it again the mind and the heart because we all hide behind walls. To allow God to change us we must be deeply aware what motivates our actions.

In conflict resolution all of us have only two responses, **flight or fight**. Why do we fight? The mind tells me I am fighting because my super righteousness comes over, I am over righteous because it is my job. I am a Bible teacher. I will give you 10 verses why you are wrong. So then we fight. The mind tells me what I am doing is righteous but if search my heart it just comes from this position where I need to be right all the time. So how do I cater that? The moment I know myself the gospel teaches me it is not so much important to be right; it is more important to understand others.

Flight:

The mind tells you better this way, go for peace. He is not going to listen to me, but the real motivation behind that if we search our hearts, it is actually a self-preservation mechanism and this will basically make you more alone and detached and some time it is not so much flight or fight it is understanding why you do what you do and then the gospel will change you to say, instead of just having this so called peace where there is a wall I recognize scripture says that the

gospel breaks down the wall of hostility, whether Jew or gentile, whether it is husband or wife, whether it is between two brothers or sisters in church and for God's glory I will not just shut up.

Know Yourself:

Why is life unfair?

This text is basically hinges off from what we read. The paradox of an unfair world and he says

**So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and to understand the madness of folly.
7:25**

The teacher is trying to figure out what is the meaning of life and he does it in two ways; the stupidity of wickedness and to understand the madness of folly. Before that he tries to understand wisdom but here is what he is saying. You and I are in church today because at one point you decided there is something more to life. You are here today because you asked, there must be a God, I don't really understand but that's why I come to church. Because if you didn't believe in God you won't be sitting here. So in all your million dollar questions you came to this conclusion there is a God. Then you came to church and then you began to doubt, if there is a God why there are so many bad things happening? If there is a God, why can't I stop doing the things I want to do? Why is it behind closed doors I do things no one knows? If there is a God, why I am so confused? Why there is so much pain and so much trouble and so the teacher now goes and tries to understand this and he breaks it into two parts.

1. He tries to understand wisdom.
2. He understands folly.

All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise"-but this was beyond me. whatever exists is far off and most profound-who can discover it?...while I was still searching but not finding 7:23-24,28

He tries to understand life, why life is like that and he couldn't. So here is first point.

1. There are limits of trying to understand everything that happens to you.

If we know everything we will be God. The best truths are the simplest truths; we don't know everything. Because the more you keep thinking and overthinking you won't be able to keep calm and sleep tight. Because you will beat yourself up and says, this is happening probably because I did wrong things in my life. The teacher is telling us that we don't need to know everything but you need to know enough and that is what the gospel is.

What is that you need to know enough?

and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. 7:25-26

If we read the end of the Book of Proverbs they give you the qualities of a noble wife. Why at the end of the Book of Proverbs the writer talks about a wife. The simple thing is because the wife at the end of the Book of Proverbs is not a literal woman. It is about wisdom personified as a woman. How do we know that? Because when you read the Book of Proverbs folly is described as the woman called folly and the woman here is symbolic and what the author is trying to tell you. You are stupid because you don't see it coming. Because what folly does to you, what sin does to you is that it ensnares you, puts you into bondage but you don't realize it. You think you are in control you are not because you just went into it and here is a very important second point.

2. Sin subtly ensnares without us realizing it.

So I am confused about my faith, I come to church I just sit at the back I am not so sure what I believe in and I feel confused, I feel guilt, I feel shame that is when sin is going to walk right through the door and you won't know it. Sin doesn't come to you with a big sign that says I am stupid, it comes very subtly, it makes you think you are righteous when you are a sinner. It makes you think that you can sin but there is no problem, so I come to church, it makes you and I stupid. Now this is such an important point because here is the question that God is asking all of us today.

Are you wise or are you stupid?

While I was still searching but not finding - I found one **upright** man among a thousand, but not one **upright** woman among them all 7:28-29

This is the Hebrew idiom, simply meaning one upright men among a thousand, is not saying a lot. He is basically saying when he was searching he found no one upright. Hang on a minute, what did he just say at the beginning of verse 15, a righteous man perishing in his righteousness. Hang on there, he has just come to something. Because he started off by saying, God it is not fair, a righteous man perishes in his righteousness it is not right but now he realizes there is no one upright or in simple English, there is no one righteous. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. After 7 chapters in Ecclesiastes he comes to his first conclusion.

This only have I found: God created mankind upright but they have gone in search of many schemes. 7:28-29

Meaning our plans in life often do not include God

The paradox of searching for God but wanting to be your own God. That is the ultimate paradox. You can test this out, tomorrow just go through the day. At night at 10 o'clock stop

and ask yourself were you conscious of God in what you did throughout the day and if God only came out when you were in trouble and you did a short prayer but the rest of the time God was absent you are your own God and that is why some of us are super-righteous, super-wicked and what we don't know ourselves.

Peter Scazzero says, "*You are going to God to avoid God.*" The most number of unsaved people sit in church, why because they think they are saved. The non-Christian will tell you I am not a Christian, don't sell me your religious garbage. The worst guy to sell to is the guy who sits in church, because he thinks he is saved and that is a paradox.

Paul says this,

I want to know Christ and the fellowship of his power.....Phil 3:10

There are many days as a man who stands up on the pulpit and because a preacher speaks to you people think that we are very religious, very holy. Paul says I want to know Christ and fellowship of his power. He describes the verse but he ends this

Not that I have already obtained all this....but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Phil 3:12

So don't threat this is something we all go through. The important thing for us is to press on, recognize where your righteousness comes from, recognize are you a bench warmer, learn to know who you are and don't come to God to run from God. Christ Jesus took hold of us. Have we got wisdom or you are I are stupid because the real wisdom from God comes from the cross.

The Ultimate Paradox

God dying for man.

- Why he did it for us who don't even one hymn to be God in our lives.
- Why he would do it for us when tomorrow we go off to work and we will just do whatever we want.
- Why will he do for us who come to church, sit in the back, don't want to join a small group, don't want to know anybody.
- Why did he do it for us who are very active in church and think God owes us a favor.
- Why he should do it for us who don't know ourselves.

He did this because he loved us and this morning he challenges us to respond.