

# Know Yourself

Ecclesiastes Part 10

Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 1-26-2014

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Summary: There are three kinds of righteousness in Scripture: behavioral, credited, and perceived. Don't go overboard in your perception and presentation of your own righteousness to others or to God. Instead, fear God. Knowing your level of righteousness is crucial in living a wise life. It will help you be patient with others' failures, and it will help you be more careful not to get close to temptation. And remember, sin is man's fault, not God's.

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**Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my futile life I have seen everything: there is a righteous man who perishes in spite of his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in spite of his evil. 16 Don't be excessively righteous, and don't be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Don't be excessively wicked, and don't be foolish. Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you grasp the one and do not let the other slip from your hand. For the one who fears God will end up with both of them. 19 Wisdom makes the wise man stronger than ten rulers of a city. 20 There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins. 21 Don't pay attention to everything people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you, 22 for you know that many times you yourself have cursed others. 23 I have tested all this by wisdom. I resolved, "I will be wise," but it was beyond me. 24 What exists is beyond reach and very deep. Who can discover it? 25 I turned my thoughts to know, explore, and seek wisdom and an explanation for things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity and folly is madness. 26 And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, her heart a net, and her hands chains. The one who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner will be captured by her. 27 "Look," says the Teacher, "I have discovered this by adding one thing to another to find out the explanation, 28 which my soul continually searches for but does not find: among a thousand people I have found one true man, but among all these I have not found a**

**true woman. 29 Only see this: I have discovered that God made people upright, but they pursued many schemes."**

**8:1 Who is like the wise person, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed.**

## Introduction

How righteous are you? God commands us to behave in certain ways – we sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. When you think of how much success you tend to have and how much failure you tend to have – how accurate do you think that assessment is? That is an important question because your assessment of your own righteousness controls a number of important things in your life. If your estimation is too high that will cause problems, and if your estimation is too low that will also cause problems. So today Solomon is going to help us gain a more accurate understanding of ourselves.

Most of us assume we know ourselves almost perfectly. But just think about how many times you do something and then think, “Why did I do that? I didn’t want to do that, I resolved not to do that, I didn’t enjoy it, I didn’t gain anything from it – why on earth did I do such a dumb thing? What was I thinking?” You don’t even know what you were thinking, and you were the one doing the thinking. How could you not pay attention to your own attention? How could you think about your own thoughts and not know what to make of them? And if you did finally figure out what you were thinking, then you have the much more difficult question of why you were thinking it. Why were you thinking what you were thinking, and why were you feeling and desiring what you were feeling and desiring?

**Proverbs 20:5 The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters**

Our motives are so complex and so hopelessly mixed that only God is capable of fully sorting them out.

**1 Corinthians 4:4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.**

So we can never have a perfect understanding of our own hearts. However, we are going to see in today’s text that it is important that we have as accurate a view of ourselves as we can – especially as we measure our own righteousness.

## Retribution Principle

In our verse-by-verse study of Ecclesiastes, we left off last week in chapter 7 at verse 14, where he says everything – both the happy days and the hard days – all of it comes from the hand of God. And verse 15 is an example of that.

**Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my futile life I have seen everything<sup>1</sup>: there is a righteous man who perishes in spite of his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in spite of his evil.**

Sometimes good things happen to bad people, and hard things happen to good people, and that’s hard to take. It’s injustice. Someday God will make all injustices right, so there is no such thing as a permanent injustice. But that kind of temporary injustice does happen in this life. And we need to understand that when it does, it is from God. Even the hard things are from God.

So verse 15 serves as a conclusion of the section we studied last week. But it also serves as an introduction to this week’s section. It is a transition. It is an example of a hard thing coming from God’s hand regarding righteous people, but as soon as he mentions righteousness, that starts him off on a new

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<sup>1</sup> This word can be translated “everything,” or “both.” Here I think the idea is “both.”

subject. He wants to teach us about this subject of righteousness – specifically, understanding your own righteousness.

## Three Kinds of Righteousness

The most basic definition of the word *righteous* is this – to be righteous means to be the way you ought to be. It means to live and act and think and talk the right way. When someone does things he should not do – that is the opposite of righteousness. When he does what he should do, then he is being righteous. That is the simplest definition of the word. But there is a problem. How do we reconcile verse 15 with verse 20? In verse 15 he says sometimes righteous people die young. But look down at verse 20.

**20 There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins.**

There he says there is no such thing as a righteous person, but in verse 15 he said he has seen them with his own eyes. Obviously he is using the word *righteous* in different ways. There are three different ways the word “righteous” is used in the Bible, and the writer of Ecclesiastes uses all three of them in this section.

### 1) Right Behavior (Behavioral Righteousness)

Let’s start with the one in verse 20. That’s the easiest one to define because he defines it for us.

**20 There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins.**

So the definition of this kind of righteousness is very simple – not sinning. Right behavior (and when I say “behavior” I’m including not just actions but also words and thoughts and attitudes and desires and motives – all of that is part of your behavior). So that is the first kind of righteousness – not sinning. Theologians call that *behavioral righteousness* – being righteous in practice. When it comes to behavioral righteousness, how many perfectly righteous people are there in the world? Zero. That is the point of verse 20. No one is perfect, no one is sinless – we all do and say and think and desire evil things. Some more than others; but we are all guilty of sin.

### 2) Right Standing (Credited Righteousness)

So if there are no righteous people, what does Solomon mean in verse 15 when he says he saw righteous people die young? There he is obviously using the word “righteous” in a different way. One of the most fundamental principles in the entire Bible is this: It is actually possible to be considered righteous by God even though you are not perfect in your behavior.

**Genesis 15:6 Abram believed in the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.**

God knows none of us are perfectly righteous in practice, but He made a way for us to still be perfectly righteous *in His sight*. You are not perfect, but you have perfection credited to your account in God’s eyes. Let’s call this kind, *credited righteousness*. (The seminary word is “imputed righteousness.”)

#### *Through Faith*

How do you get this kind? How do you get God to credit righteousness to your account even though you aren’t perfect in practice? How did Abraham get it? It says he believed in Yahweh. To believe in someone means to trust the person so much that you become a follower of that person. Abraham trusted God so much he entrusted his whole life to God and followed God’s way instead of his own way. And when God saw that level of faith, God said, “I will count that as if it were righteousness.” If you trust God like that He will give you credit for being perfectly righteous even though you are not perfectly righteous.

### ***By Grace***

Pretty sweet deal, huh? You get credit for something you haven't even done. It is a gift. That is why the Bible says we are saved by grace alone – grace refers to a gift. And the only way to get that gift is through faith – no other way. If you trust Jesus enough to follow Him, God will credit Jesus' perfect righteousness to your account, and He will credit all your sins to Jesus' account (which is why Jesus had to die on the cross).

### ***Improving Behavior***

Now, when a person gets that credited righteousness, does that have any impact on his behavior? Absolutely! Trusting Jesus Christ in this way will always have a purifying effect on your life because you are trusting that His way is the best way. So you will strive to walk in that way and your thoughts and feelings and desires and words and actions become more and more what they should be – more and more righteous. So people who have credited righteousness also have ever-increasing behavioral righteousness. It is a work in progress, and it is not perfect, but God accepts it and is pleased by it because of the credited righteousness (which is perfect). So if someone claims to have credited righteousness (they claim to be a believer), but there is no increase in behavioral righteousness, they are kidding themselves.

The vast majority of the time, when you see the word “righteous” in the Bible, it is being used in one of those two ways – either behavioral righteousness or credited righteousness. But with that in mind, what are we to make of verse 16?

### **16 Don't be excessively righteous, and don't be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself?**

What does that mean? Try to be moderately sinful once in a while? Try to be moderately stupid here and there for balance? What is he saying here?

## **3) Right Reputation (Perceived Righteousness)**

When he says **don't be overly wise**, that verb translated **be** is in a reflexive form, which means “to show yourself as being.” It has to do with the way you present yourself. And the construction translated **don't be excessively righteous** can be translated the same way. We don't see those exact phrases anywhere else in the Bible, but outside of the Bible there are Hebrew documents that have these phrases. For example, a Hebrew document known as Sirach has those same terms, and it is translated this way:

Sirach 7:5 Do not parade your uprightness before the Lord, or your wisdom before the king.

Sirach 10:26 Do not try to be smart when you do your work, do not put on airs when you are in difficulties.

So it has to do with how you portray yourself, and that is the third way that the word *righteous* is used in the Bible. It is sometimes used to refer to a person's impression or opinion about his own level of righteousness and how he portrays himself to others. An example of this usage is Matthew 9:11-13.

**Matthew 9:11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "... 13 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."**

Was He implying that these Pharisees were actually righteous in their behavior? No. Did they have credited righteousness through faith? No. But they thought they were righteous, and they wanted everyone else to think of them as righteous.

So the third way that the word “righteous” is used is to describe the image of yourself that you convey to others, which is based on your own conception of how righteous you are. And that is the kind we see in verse 16.

## **Don't Be Over-Righteous**

When he says **Don't be over righteous**, he is not talking about behavioral righteousness. He is not saying, “Be careful not to obey God too much.” You could never obey God too much. But what you can do too much is advertise your obedience to God and your wisdom. You cannot go too far in being righteous, but you can go overboard in worrying about your reputation.

### **Presenting Yourself to People**

Your reputation is an important thing. And if the people who love you think you did something bad, but you didn't actually do it, it is a loving thing to do to let them know. If you are righteous, then portray yourself as righteous. Be honest about what you are. That is perfectly fine to do that – up to a point. But it is possible to take that too far. Some people are so consumed with worry about their reputation, and it is so important to them that everybody think well of them that they just cannot stand it if anyone wrongly thinks ill of them – or if they did something good and didn't get credit for it, that drives them crazy. If they don't get proper credit for what they have done, they are filled with distress and anxiety. Letting people know about the good things you have done is okay, but it is a small priority. It is just not very important. And that goes not only for how you portray yourself to people, but also for how you portray yourself to God.

### **Presenting Yourself to God**

Some people try to use their own righteousness to manipulate God. They want certain things in life, so they obey God's commands and serve Him in His church in order to force God's hand to give them the things they want. They try to use righteousness and wisdom to bypass the curse and gain control over when and how God will bless them.

### **Disappointment**

Solomon warns us – don't do that. Why not? Because you will be disappointed. Look at the end of the verse.

#### **16 ...Why should you destroy yourself?**

The word translated **destroy**, in this form (Hitpolel) always means to be emotionally devastated or depressed or perplexed.<sup>2</sup> If you try to gain control over providence by being righteous and wise, you will end up perplexed and disheartened by the outcome, because most of the time it won't be what you had in mind.

## **Don't Be Over-Wicked**

So don't get carried away with protecting your reputation. Advertising your righteousness is not very important. But the converse of this is also true. Don't go too far in advertising your sin either.

#### **17 Don't be excessively wicked, and don't be foolish. Why should you die before your time?**

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<sup>2</sup> Ps.143:4, Isa.59:16, 63:5, Dan.8:27.

Again, the point is not that you should be moderately wicked rather than excessively wicked. The point is, don't parade your wickedness or folly. It is good to be humble and to admit your sin.

**Proverbs 28:13 The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy.**

**James 5:16 confess your sins to one another ... so that you may be healed.**

It is good to admit your sins and to be open and honest about the wickedness and foolishness in your life. But that can be taken too far as well.

## **Presenting Yourself to People**

Some people think humility is all about making a big show of how sinful they are. And they spend so much time talking about what a failure they are, and how far they fall short, and what a wretch they are, and on and on until everyone is just sick of hearing it. That is really a form of pride because it is still a focus on self. Humble people don't go on and on about how bad they are because they are not focused mainly on thinking about themselves. Most of their thoughts are about God and others. When you get too carried away with presenting yourself as sinful and wretched, you make yourself noxious to people and hard to be around. It is not loving to be like that, and nothing good comes of it.

## **Presenting Yourself to God**

And again, this applies to the way you present yourself to God. There are some Christians who seem to think the only thing God is interested in hearing from you is confession of sin. God does want us to be honest about our sin, but what about the righteousness that He works in us? What about the fruit the Holy Spirit bears through us? When God works in you to will and to act, and over a period of years finally brings about a forgiving heart in you, or patience or kindness or joy or peace or a refusal to keep a record of wrongs or a hunger and thirst for righteousness—do you think it is pleasing to Him if you ignore that? Or downplay it? Don't you think He would rather us show gratitude for it? But how can you express gratitude for it if you won't even acknowledge it?

If there is sin there, be honest about it and confess it to God. And if there is righteousness there, celebrate that and offer thanksgiving to God.

What he is telling us to do here is to simply gain a proper, balanced perspective on ourselves. We tend to be much too black and white in our assessments. We oversimplify things and think either, "I'm good, and not bad," or "I'm bad, and not good." But the fallen, redeemed human heart is far more complex than that. There is much good, and much evil simultaneously existing in us. And to fix all our attention on one while turning a blind eye to the other is not wise.

## **Fear God**

**18 It is good that you grasp the one and do not let the other slip from your hand. For the one who fears God will end up with both of them.**

If you fear God, that will keep you within reasonable limits in both directions of how you present yourself. Fear of God will also keep you from trying to use your righteousness to control providence or bypass the curse because you cannot fear God and try to control God at the same time. If you think you can get God to do what you want by jumping through His hoops, that is a low view of God – not a reverent fear.

And fearing God will also keep you from getting carried away in how you present yourself to people. People who obsess about their reputation fear man more than they fear God. They care more about what people think of them than they do about what God thinks of them. They are way more concerned about

their reputation on earth than they are about their reputation in heaven. But when you fear God, and His assessment of you matters more to you than anything else, you find that you just don't have much interest in worrying about what people think anymore.

## **Self-Knowledge Helps Your Relationships**

That takes us through verse 18. The rest of this section is just a list of proverbs and wisdom sayings that instruct us on how to live wisely, but with a particular focus on the role that self-knowledge plays in living wisely. If you have a skewed or out-of-balance understanding of your own righteousness and wickedness, that will interfere with your ability to live wisely.

### **Use Wisdom, and You Will Be powerful**

#### **19 Wisdom makes the wise man stronger than ten rulers of a city.**

The word **rulers** refers to those who control a lot of resources and have a lot of influence. You will have more influence than all the most influential people in the city if you simply exercise wisdom. Instead of trying to get influence by letting everyone know how much education you have, and getting people to the point of being impressed with how wise you must be – just act wisely. Living wisely will influence people far more than going around trying to protect your reputation.

So live wisely, but keep in mind your limitations.

#### **20 There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins.**

No matter how good you get, you are never going to reach sinless perfection. Even the most godly, righteous person in the world sins regularly.

#### **Proverbs 20:9 Who can say, “I have kept my heart pure”?**

No one.

### **Knowing Yourself Makes You Patient with Others**

And understanding that can go a long way in helping you deal with people wisely, because knowing your sin makes you more understanding with their sin.

#### **21 Don't pay attention to everything people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you, 22 for you know that many times you yourself have cursed others.**

Don't listen to what people are saying about you. Why? Because they are saying something bad. How do you know that? Because those people are just like you, and you say bad things about them, don't you? And don't try to deny it, because we all do it. We know it's wrong, we try to do it less and less, but when it comes to our speech, we all stumble in many ways. Let's just admit it – there are plenty of things that come out of our mouths that we really wouldn't want to get back to the person we are talking about.

“Yeah, but it's not like I have malice in my heart toward the person. Sure, I pointed out a flaw, but I still respect that person and love that person. I don't look down on him in any way.”

Exactly! That is exactly the point. It is possible to make a negative remark about someone, and still have mostly love and respect for that person. You know that is a reality in your life, so why can't it be a reality in the lives of those people who say negative things about you? We get so outraged when we find out that someone gossiped about us, and half the time the way we discover that is in a conversation where we are gossiping about them!

Again, I am not saying this justifies gossip. Unnecessary gossip is sin, and we should fight hard to get it out of our speech as much as possible. But while we are fighting the battle against that sin in our

hearts, can we at least admit that we haven't won the battle? Can we admit that we often slip? And just as those slips don't mean we hate the person, so we should realize that their slips don't mean they hate us.

And this principle applies to other sins as well. Gossip is just one illustration, but being alert to your own sinfulness will help you be patient with other people's sinfulness in all kinds of contexts. How about when someone makes a commitment but doesn't follow through? Haven't there been times you have done that? "Well yeah, but it was because..." – sure, maybe you had a great excuse, but maybe they do too. How about when someone lies to you? Isn't it true that sometimes you are not totally honest?

"Yeah, but their lie was a big, bald-faced lie right to my face!"

Oh, so your little, subtle deceptions are so much better because they are behind their back? People who are constantly condemning other people for their failures are usually people who have a head-in-the-sand approach to their own sinfulness.

The hardest times to put this principle into action are those times when the person commits some sin that you don't struggle with at all. That area of righteousness seems easy to you, and so you are tempted to think, "If he was really serious about changing, he would." That is baloney. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that all you have to do to gain victory over a besetting sin is just get serious about it. Isn't it true that there are some areas of sin in your life that you are very serious about changing but you still fail? When you are tempted to look down on someone for failing in areas that are easy for you, remind yourself that for them, that area may be just as difficult as whatever your area of weakness is for you.

"Does this mean we should never confront anyone on sin?"

No. If the person is on a path toward self-destruction, then the only loving thing to do is to call them to repentance. But when you do that, don't do it with a condescending attitude – like you are better than them. Do it with an attitude that says, "You and I are both sinners. I have repented – come join me in repentance." That is how we confront sin.

## Wisdom Is Elusive

And that is also how we deal with foolishness in other people. Again, we need to realize that we don't exactly have a corner on wisdom either. One of the keys to being wise is realizing how elusive wisdom really is.

**23 I have tested all this by wisdom. I resolved, "I will be wise," but it was beyond me. 24 What exists is beyond reach and very deep. Who can discover it? 25 I turned my thoughts to know, explore, and seek wisdom and an explanation for things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity and folly is madness.**

It is very, very, very hard to convince your heart of this simple truth: sinning is dumb. This sin that I so often struggle with – I know in my head that it is just absolute stupidity to do that. And yet, I choose to do it again and again. Why? Because the kind of wisdom it takes to see that sin as stupidity right at the moment of temptation – that kind of wisdom is easy to get in your head but incredibly hard to get it into your bloodstream. It is hard to get to the point where that wisdom pervades your whole being enough to control your desires. It is difficult because wisdom is so elusive, and also because sin is so enticing.

## Self-Knowledge Helps with Temptation

### Sin Is Enticing

**26 And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart a snare, and whose hands are chains.**

He describes a seductress who is so skilled at drawing men into sin that all you have to do is get within arm's reach of her and you are trapped. And what Solomon is doing here is using a woman like that as an illustration of temptation in general. All temptation works this way - it draws you in like a trap



set by a hunter. When a hunter sets a trap, he doesn't put a big, flashing, neon sign pointing to the trap. He hides it. He wants the animal to sense no danger at all as it approaches the trap. Otherwise it will never work. And that is how Satan is with temptation. I believe very often Satan goes out of his way to prevent you from feeling any temptation at all just so he can get you to wander closer to the trap. A guy and a girl are dating, and they have an opportunity to be alone together in a morally dangerous situation, and they think, "You know, normally I wouldn't do this, but right now – it's ok. Right now I'm strong. I don't feel the slightest bit of temptation to sin. My heart is pure, and the thought of any kind of impurity isn't even appealing to me right now." And so they decide it's ok to be in this private place all alone for an extended time. They feel so spiritually strong – if temptation does arise it will be a piece of cake to resist. In fact, we are so strong, it's fine to watch a movie together, and sit on the couch together – really close. And Satan withholds temptation, holds it back, holds it back, lures them farther and farther into his trap. Then finally, it's 1:00 in the morning, both are tired, guard is down, maybe a little kiss, and then BAM– here comes the full, unrestrained onslaught of temptation from Satan out of nowhere and before they know it they have fallen into immorality. And you talk to them the next day and they always say the same thing: "I don't know what happened. I don't know where that came from. I was fine, not tempted at all, and then all of a sudden – I don't know what came over me, but before I knew it, it was too late."

That is the way temptation works. A person struggles with overeating, and they think, "It's ok. I can go with my friends to this party or restaurant. I'm not tempted. I'll be strong." Or "I can be home alone, watching TV with no accountability and food all around me – I'll be fine." And there is no temptation at all until the person has wandered so far into the trap that when it springs they don't have a chance.

"I can go to this party. I won't be tempted to drink."

"I can click on that link – it's just curiosity. I'm not tempted to look at anything bad."

"I can go into that bar, hang out with those friends, play just one innocent game in the casino– I can just drive by that area just to see what's going on, I won't get out of my car."

In fact, in some cases Satan will let you wander into the trap and then walk right back out without getting caught– just to fill you up with such a sense of being strong that you really let your guard down the next time. And when you fall you think that's just an anomaly, because last time you didn't fall.

The picture here is very vivid. It says **her hands are chains**. Attached to the end of her wrists, instead of hands, are handcuffs. You don't notice it until you get close. You think you are safe, but as soon as you are within arm's reach, she touches you and instantly you're chained. You're caught. And the result, Solomon says, **is more bitter than death**.

Why do we keep falling for that same trick every time? Usually it is because we have way too high a view of our own righteousness and wisdom. When you are weak and you know you are weak, you're careful. But when you are weak and you think you're strong, you tend to do foolish things – like wander way too close to temptation.

We already saw last week that wisdom can be short circuited by desire. This is another example of that same principle. No matter how wise you are and how much doctrine you have learned and how much experience you have, one strong desire can cancel all of that out in a heartbeat. If you try to fight the battle against sin with knowledge and ideas and information and principles alone– without dealing with the issue of desires, you can forget about having any lasting victory. Sinful desires have to be kept at bay, and that cannot be done by feeding those desires.

### ***How to Escape: Please God***

So how do you escape temptation?

### **26 ...The one who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner will be captured by her.**

If you please God in other areas, God will give you more grace to escape temptation in this area.

But the more you compromise in other areas, the more God will allow you to become susceptible to temptation. Sin always breeds more sin, and righteousness produces more righteousness.

**Galatians 6:7 Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows he will also reap, 8 because the one who sows to the flesh, from the flesh will reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.**

The flesh refers to that part of you that still sins even after you become a Christian. It is the part of you that is tied in with and influenced by this evil world. And sowing to the flesh means doing things that will activate and strengthen the responses of that part of you. There are certain commercials that you can watch, certain people you can be around, certain places you can go, certain memories you can dwell on, that will activate your flesh. You start dwelling on how someone hurt you, or you start fantasizing about some forbidden thing, or you start thinking about something from a worldly perspective, and you don't do or say anything sinful, but in your thoughts you are planting weeds that are going to grow up and be hard to kill.

But it works the other way too. You can plant good seeds in your heart too. You can sow to the Spirit. Ideally, that is what you are doing right now. There might be a few of you out there right now sowing to the flesh in your thoughts and attitudes, but my guess is most of you are right now sowing to the Spirit. You are thinking thoughts and moving your soul in a direction toward God. And that will pay dividends – dividends that in most cases you won't even notice. A temptation will rise up and you will blow right by it without even giving it a second thought. And it seems like that is just because it was not a strong temptation. But what you don't realize is that if you had not been sowing to the Spirit as much as you have, you would have fallen to that temptation. That might happen 100 times in a day. Who knows how many horrible sins you might be mired in right now in your life if it hadn't been for all the time you have spent sowing to the Spirit? Temptation, with her handcuff hands, snuck up behind you and tried to grab on, but because you have been pleasing God and sowing to the Spirit, He saw to it that you escaped.

## **Righteousness is Rare**

Pleasing God and sowing to the Spirit are wonderful things, but not very many people do it. Millions of people say, "Oh, I prayed a prayer and went forward at an invitation and invited Jesus into my heart and my personal Lord and Savior," and they meant it with all their heart, but they aren't actually saved. There has not been any actual transformation. If you look around for truly godly people, you are not going to find many.

**27 "Look," says the Teacher, "I have discovered this by adding one thing to another to find out the explanation, 28 which my soul continually searches for but does not find: among a thousand people I have found one true man, but among all these I have not found a true woman.**

Now, a lot of people in our hypersensitive culture read that and say, "What!? How can he say that men are so much better than women?" But look at it again – is that really what he's saying? One hundred percent of women are bad, but men are way better because only 99.9% of them are bad? The point here is not that men are better than women. The difference between 1 in 1000 and 0 in 1000 is statistically insignificant. Imagine I went off to visit some huge church to see if I could learn some things for Agape. So I go there for several weeks, and when I come home you ask me, "What was that church like?" And I say, "Oh man, it was terrible. I interviewed every single person there. It's a church of 1000 people, and I met one guy who I think is saved – and no women." If you heard that, would your conclusion be, "Wow, the men in that church are sure a lot better than the women!?" No. You would just say, "Wow, what a terrible church." I do not think Solomon is making a contrast between men and women at all. The switch from men to women is just poetic word variety. You could switch it around – one woman in 1000 and zero men, and the point would be exactly the same. His point is simply to make a dramatic statement about how rare upright people really are. There are almost none of them out there.

## Evil Is not from God

That is a lot of wisdom principles to take in. But one thing about the Preacher – he never goes very long without turning our attention back to God. If you get caught up with trying to live out all these wisdom principles without a gaze that is fixed on truth about God, you will fail. So in verse 29 he lifts our eyes upward and tells us something very important about the nature of God.

**29 Only see this: I have discovered that God made people upright, but they pursued many schemes.**

The Preacher has been telling us again and again about how everything is from God – happy days and hard days – all of it. But that always brings up the question about God’s role in evil. If God is totally sovereign, wouldn’t that imply that God is ultimately the cause of evil? Some Calvinists get so carried away in human reasoning that they end up saying, “Yes. Ultimately, God is the one who causes evil.” The Bible doesn’t say that. James 1:13 is very clear – God does not tempt or entice anyone to evil. God has a plan. And His plan often includes evil people doing specific evil things. That’s part of God’s plan, but when God brings about that plan, He does not do it by influencing those people in an evil direction. Part of God’s plan was for Judas to betray Jesus and for wicked men to murder Jesus. God brought all that about. But how? Did God move in Judas’ heart to entice him in an evil direction to get him to betray Jesus? No – the exact opposite. The only force God ever exerts on any human heart is in the direction of righteousness. But sinful man always resists that and pulls in the other direction. So God can bring about His plan by pulling harder in some cases, and not as hard in others. God brought about His plan through Judas not by pushing Judas, but by letting Judas go.

Arminians who are governed by human reasoning say, “Logic says that if God were sovereign, that would mean He is guilty of causing evil. And the Bible says God isn’t the cause of evil, therefore God cannot be sovereign.” Calvinists who are governed by human reasoning say, “Logic says if God is sovereign, that means he must be the ultimate cause of evil. And the Bible says God is sovereign; therefore He is the ultimate cause of evil.” Both groups are right about what the Bible says, but they are wrong in their first premise. God is both sovereign, and holy. He is not the cause of evil, and He is in control of everything. If you are wondering where the blame for evil should finally land, the Preacher tells us.

**29 ... God made people upright, but they pursued many schemes.**

The explanation for sin lies in the disobedience and wickedness of man. God only does good things.

## Conclusion

And before we close – one last reminder: What is the purpose of this book? It is to teach us to enjoy life by pleasing God. Everything he is teaching us will help us along the pathway toward real joy – including all these wisdom principles.

**8:1 Who is like the wise person, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed.**

**Benediction: Philippians 1:9-11 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God**

## **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) Which kinds of sins in the lives of others do you have the hardest time understanding or being patient with? How could a better understanding of your own weaknesses help you with this?
- 2) Are you one of the righteous (credited righteousness)? How do you know for sure? If you remember your conversion, briefly tell the group the story.