

The Righteous and the Wicked

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

There are several passages in the Bible that contrast the lives of the righteous and the wicked. Within these passages we learn that the wicked often enjoy relative ease and prosperity in their lives, but the righteous often endure troubles and hardship, even as they walk in obedience to the Lord.

In the midst of his sufferings, Job, in one of his rebuttals to the theology of his three friends, voiced his observations regarding the prosperity that he saw in the lives of the wicked. And as we will see, Job’s observations are consistent with the observations that we see in Psalm 73, and with teachings in several New Testament passages as well.

Lessons from Job 21 and Psalm 73

Job is described in the Bible as “blameless” and “upright”, and as a man who feared God and turned away from evil.” (Job 1:1, 1:8, 2:3). As recorded in Job 21:7-18, we see that in the depth of sufferings and losses that had come upon him

through no fault or wrongdoing of his own, Job questioned why the wicked prospered and lived to grow old, increasing in power and wealth. He observed that their homes were free from fear and threatening circumstances. He also observed that God's rod of correction did not come upon them, and that both they and their children prospered and enjoyed life.

Job observed that the wicked, with all of the abundance they enjoyed, had no place for God in their lives, and they perceived nothing to be gained by praying to Him. Although he questioned why God had given them so much in terms of material prosperity and benefits in their lives, Job understood what the wicked did not: the prosperity they enjoyed was ultimately not something that they had managed to achieve for themselves, but it was given to them by God.

Job said regarding the prosperity of the wicked: "Behold, their prosperity is not in their hand; The counsel of the wicked is far from me." (Job 21:16). Job was completely uninterested in the counsel of the wicked and whatever advice they may give, because he knew that they have no wisdom to offer. He understood that worldly prosperity is often given to the wicked, but it is not given to them because God accepts them, approves of their actions, or is pleased with them.

In Psalm 73, we see that the psalmist's observations are very similar to Job's. He struggled when he saw the relative ease and prosperity in the lives of the wicked, compared to the troubles and afflictions of his own life.

He had become disillusioned, and his faith had nearly faltered because he envied the wicked when he saw that they had good health and strong bodies, and they were free of many of the burdens and afflictions that are common among men. Because of their prosperity and freedom from affliction, he observed that they became prideful, arrogant, callous and conceited, speaking with malice and threatening oppression.

In verse 9, the psalmist observed that in the midst of their evil ways, the wicked still claimed to serve God and claimed that Heaven would be their eternal destiny. They were most likely convinced that their sinful courses of action were indeed the right things to do. And at the same time, they probably would have seen their prosperity and good fortune as evidence of God's approval of them and the things they do.

As he continued with his observations of the lives of the wicked, the psalmist wrote: "Therefore his people return to this place, and waters of abundance

are drunk by them.” (Psalm 73:10). When others of the world see the prosperity of the wicked and how well things are going for them in life, they will turn to them for advice and counsel about how they managed to obtain all of these benefits for themselves.

In verse 12 we see that the psalmist had concluded that the wicked always seem to be at ease and carefree, and they always seem to be getting even wealthier. In the next verse, we see that in his disillusionment he wondered what use there was in obeying God’s commands, since he saw that the wicked are the ones who so often prosper. However, in verse 15 he wrote that if he had voiced his opinion that it was useless to keep one’s heart pure, walking in obedience to the Lord, he “would have betrayed” God’s children, causing them to stumble by speaking falsely about Him.

Though the psalmist was at first grieved and embittered when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, God did not leave him in the barrenness of this bitter disillusionment. God gave him the understanding that the prosperity of the wicked is only for a time, and their final destiny will be ruin and destruction, being “utterly swept away by sudden terrors” (Psalm 73:19).

An Example of Continuity in the Teachings of the Bible

Job and the author of Psalm 73 both observed the prosperity enjoyed by the wicked and the hardships faced by those who obey the Lord. And their observations are consistent with teachings given by Jesus centuries later.

In John 16:20-22, Jesus taught us as His disciples that now during this present life we will weep and mourn, while those of the world will rejoice. He then encouraged us when He said that although now is our time of grief, the day will come when we will see Him face to face, and at that time all of our grief will turn to joy.

When we consider Psalm 73 in the light of John 16:20-22, we see that the psalmist grieved when he saw the prosperity and relative ease of the lives of the wicked, in contrast to the hardships of his own life. He watched in the midst of his own mourning as the wicked experienced their prosperity and rejoiced.

In Luke 6:20-26, Jesus taught along similar lines when He pronounced woes upon those of the world who enjoyed their abundance and consolations in this life,

and He pronounced blessings upon His disciples who were poor, who mourned, and who hungered during this present life. And in Luke 16:19-31 we see yet another consistent teaching. In this passage Jesus taught that the rich man who enjoyed a life of luxury was ultimately rejected by God, while the poor, afflicted beggar Lazarus was ultimately accepted by God and comforted.

The consistency of the teaching in all of these passages is only one example among many in the Bible of several different passages of Scripture being in complete harmony and agreement with one another on a particular subject. When we interpret Scripture in the light of other Scriptures, and the teachings and understanding that we derive from our interpretations are in no way contradicted by other teachings in the Scriptures, then we can be confident that we have correctly handled the word of truth, as Paul exhorted Timothy (2 Timothy 2:15).

Biblical interpretations that are not contradicted by other passages of Scripture can be accepted as God's word to us on a particular subject, as given through several different authors of various books of the Bible. However, if we encounter contradiction and confusion in our interpretation, then we can be sure that there is some degree of misunderstanding in our interpretation. We should then ask God to reveal His truth to us, which He will do in His time for all believers.

The Holy Bible is God's consistent revelation given over the centuries of His plan for the salvation of men through faith in Jesus Christ, and through Him alone. The Scriptures are God's directives, precepts, and commands on how man should conduct himself during his time here on earth, and they provide insights into some of the ways of God.

The Scriptures also give us understanding and comfort in perplexing times of trial, just as the psalmist received comfort when God revealed to him that his obedience to Him was not in vain, and that the prosperity he saw in the lives of the wicked was only temporary. He was given the understanding that the final destiny of the wicked was to be destruction and ruin. But for him, God would guide him through this life with His counsel, and afterward take him home to glory (Psalm 73:14).

Other Teachings from Jesus and James

Another passage that demonstrates the contrast between the righteous and the wicked is Jesus' teaching on the sheep and the goats, which is given to us in

Matthew 25:31-46. In this passage Jesus used the analogy of a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats in a flock, in order to describe the way that He will separate those who are blessed by His Father from the wicked.

Jesus characterized those who are blessed by God as His sheep, and He said that their inheritance and place in God's kingdom has been prepared for them since the creation of the world. Jesus' teaching here brings to mind Ephesians 1:4, where Paul taught that we as God's people were chosen by Him before the world was created to be holy and blameless before Him.

Continuing in this passage of Matthew 25, Jesus taught about the good works that will be manifested in our lives as His blessed people. These works will demonstrate a love for our fellow believers and will include such things as giving of the resources that God has given to us so that others in the Body of Christ who are in need may be helped. Other examples of these works of love that Jesus mentioned are visiting brothers who are in prison or looking after other believers who may be sick or infirm in some way.

When we do good works like these, then we also give something of our lives as a "ransom" for those we help, in that we are sacrificing something of ourselves for the benefit of other believers (Mark 10:45). And as we do so, we will, even if only in some small way, share in the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured for the sake of His people (Romans 8:17).

Jesus continued in this passage of Matthew 25, teaching that His sheep will all give evidence of their genuine faith by the works of love that will be manifested in their lives. And He said that just as we have shown love, mercy, and compassion to the least of His brethren and ours, we have also done the same for Him. Jesus proclaimed that the destiny of all His sheep will be eternal life.

In contrast to the good works that will be manifested in the lives of His sheep, Jesus described the deeds of the wicked, whom He symbolized as goats. Works of love that are demonstrated in the lives of His sheep are absent from their lives. And Jesus said that just as they refuse to show love, mercy, and compassion toward the least of His brethren, they have also done the same to Him.

Even though they may claim to be Christians (Matthew 7:15-23), by their works they demonstrate that the faith they claim to have is not genuine. Jesus proclaimed that their ultimate destiny will be eternal punishment and separation from God.

What we learn from Jesus' teaching on the sheep and the goats is that a genuine faith is going to manifest itself by actions; it is going to be evidenced by what one does – by his works. Once again, there is another passage of Scripture that provides instruction for us along these same lines. This passage is in the letter of James, and perhaps James recalled Jesus' teaching on the sheep and the goats when he gave us this instruction. James taught that regardless of one's claim to have faith in Christ, if their claimed faith is not manifested by action taken that will meet the needs of a brother or sister in Christ who is lacking the necessities of life, when one has the means to meet the need, then their claimed faith is dead (James 2:14-17).

Jesus and James both taught the same truth: a genuine faith will always be accompanied by good works, which demonstrate love for other believers. These good works are the evidence that our faith is real. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35).

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:15-23 is yet another passage that contrasts the lives of the righteous and the wicked, and His teaching here is also consistent with His teaching on the sheep and the goats. In this passage Jesus taught that good fruit will be born in the lives of believers, in contrast to the bad fruit that will be born in the lives of the wicked. He concluded by saying that that not everyone who calls Him Lord, or claims to be a Christian, will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of God the Father. Jesus taught that many of the wicked will acknowledge Him as Lord, and even claim to have done many miraculous deeds in His name, but in the end He will tell them that He never knew them, and He will command them to depart from Him (Matthew 7:21-23).

Those however whose faith is proven to be genuine by the good works they do will one day hear the words of their Lord and Savior saying:

"Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.".... "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:34-36, 40).