

The Evil of Prosperity

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

1. Introduction.
2. V.1—Observation 1.
 - a. “Evil” is not a reference to moral wickedness, but used by Solomon in Ecclesiastes to refer to the frustrations of life.
 - i. Inexplicable frustration.
 - ii. “Prevalent among men” (NASB) is better translated as “weighs heavily among men” (NIV).
 - b. V.2.
 - i. “Riches, wealth, and honor” is a reference to the things that drive a person (cf. 1Jn. 2:16).
 - ii. The sovereignty of God in the prosperity of man. The same phraseology is used elsewhere:
 1. 1Kings 3:14 – The prosperity of Solomon.
 2. Deut. 8:17-18—The prosperity of nations.
 - iii. The sovereignty of God in withholding, or even stripping away, prosperity (cf. Job 1:21).
 1. Since God sovereignly prospers a person, prosperity is not bad or evil. As such, a person should not feel guilty if they live in prosperity.
 2. Prosperity should lead to thanksgiving.
 - iv. The frustration.

1. God prospers a person, but then does not allow them to enjoy that prosperity.
2. The foreigner—Solomon driving home what seems to be unjust.
3. A person whom God has prospered, but has not allowed them to enjoy that prosperity is worse off than if God had not given them prosperity in the first place.

c. V.3—Solomon illustrates his point.

i. 2 symbols of OT blessing: children and length of days.

1. God opens the womb (Gen. 30:22; 1Sam. 1:5-6).
2. Children are gifts of God (Ps. 127:3-5).
3. God appoints length of life (Ps. 139; Job, 14).
4. Long life is an explicit indication of God's blessing (Deut. 4:40).

ii. Solomon's statement is seemingly contrary to traditional Jewish wisdom.

1. The point is that the ability to enjoy God's blessings is a blessing itself.

iii. To have God's material blessings, but not be able to enjoy those blessings is a worse kind of life than the life of the miscarried—the miscarried do not have to experience the frustrations of hebel.

1. The term "rest" is omitted, but should be included in the text.
2. Solomon's point is that a person who isn't able to enjoy God's blessings lives a restless life, whereas the miscarried are able to enter rest.

iv. V. 6—External blessing is not necessarily an indication of true blessedness.

- v. While God grants the divine capacity for joy, Solomon never discounts individual human responsibility (cf. Phil. 4).

3. Vss. 7-12—Observation 2.

- a. Solomon echoes back to ch. 1 and speaks about the monotony of life.
 - i. V. 7 is echoing Ecc. 1:7.
 - ii. Vs. 8 is speaking to the person who thinks they're the exception.
- b. V. 9—What the eyes see cannot fill what the soul craves.
- c. Vss. 10-12.
 - i. The Hebrew word Adam is the exact same Hebrew word for “man” and “ground.”
 - 1. The point of Solomon is once again to remind us that we are but dust.
 - 2. God is the Creature, we are the creature.
 - ii. V. 11—No amount of words or grumbling will change your circumstance. In fact, they simply increase the hebel.
 - iii. V. 12—Man doesn't actually know what's best for him.
 - 1. Man doesn't know what God has planned for him.
 - 2. God sovereignly determines our lot.

4. Conclusion.

- a. We tend to view prosperity as good and adversity as bad, but the Bible casts the opposite worldview.

- b. Perhaps God brings adversity to teach us something. Perhaps He's even pleased to strip you of something you treasure, so that He might create in you a greater capacity for joy—for a joy that's eternal.
- c. When all is said and done, the implication of ch. 6 is to find joy and contentment in what God has given you.

Small Group Questions:

1. What stood out to you in this sermon?
2. What are some things in your life that you thought would satisfy, but have failed?
3. In what ways are you seeking to become prosperous? In other words, what are some neutral (i.e., non-evil) things in your life that are perhaps pulling you away from the Lord? (Leaders: don't settle for easy answers here. It can be subtle).
4. What are some practical ways you can fight discontentment in your life?