

One of Life's Paradoxes

Listen to these words from the wise king of Israel: "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity." (Ecclesiastes 8:12-14)

Solomon here recognizes the seeming prosperity of the wicked; but denies that it will always be so. He observes how it appears that the wicked receive the blessings they do not deserve; while righteous men seem to have the reward of the wicked. But this is a vanity that cannot last. In the final analysis, it shall not be well with the wicked. And God will surely bless those who faithfully serve Him.

Someone may ask: "Why does 'so-and-so' have such a hard time? He is such a good person." Or it might be said: "That man is wicked, dishonest person; but look at the good fortune he has. He has prospered in his wickedness." These observations are often made, but seldom understood. The truth is that God has not promised His people that life on the earth will always be pleasant. In fact, Christians can expect many trials of their faith and patience, knowing that it is in the end that they have their true reward.

It is evident that men must reap as they sow. The prosperity of the wicked is evidence only of the delay of his true reward. God's Saints are not forgotten. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And be not weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Galatians 6:7-9

It should be easily seen, then, that the measure of one's spiritual status is not found in his material prosperity. We cannot determine that we are right with God on the basis of earthly good fortune. Of course, righteous men often prosper; but so far as material things are concerned, so do the wicked. The only real standard by which we may know we are right with God is the teaching of His word.

The Christian life is abundantly rewarding while it is being lived; but the great reward is at the end. For this reason, God's people should not be dismayed by the grief or hardship they may have to endure for the present time. Paul suffered greatly in his service for Christ, but he called it a "light affliction, which is but for a moment," saying that it "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Then, he explained: "While we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." II Corinthians 4:17 -18