

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE WICKED ECCLESIASTES 9: 1-6 Bro Chris Afekolu (Bishop)

PREAMBLE

Chapter 9 is a continuation of our previous discussion on the book of Ecclesiastes. Instead of bring in new topic, The Preacher tries to draw conclusion on the **series of life's unpredictable twists and turns**. Each point includes a declaration of what he had learned under the sun.

“For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them. All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun”. (Ecclesiastes 9:1-6 NKJV)

Three outlines will help drive our learning today and as well constitutes the key takeaway from our discussion. These are listed below;

1) God is the One who decides on the distribution of His Gifts; verse 1

2) Common Destiny for man; verses 2-3

3) Hope remains while one is living; verses 4-6

God is the One who decides on the distribution of His Gifts

In making his observation about life, Solomon had “considered all this in my heart” (9:1). While it seems reasonable that “Righteous men, wise men” would have some sense of what the future have in store, that is not the case. These men of spirituality and intelligence do not know whether they will face “love or hatred.” Here,

Solomon was talking about how God deals with people (“their works are in the hand of God”). What God will decide to do in an individual life is unknown. Some passages in the Scripture promises God’s blessings. (Matthew 6:25,26; Mark 10:30),

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they"? (Matthew 6:25-26 NKJV)

While others indicate that Christians may not enjoy much comfort in this life (as with Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31; Romans 8:35-39).

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Romans 8:35-39 NKJV)

God is the One who decides on the distribution of His gifts. God blesses some with great wealth (I am not talk about wealth from corrupt individuals), while others are allotted poverty. We do not know why; we just have to trust Him. The learning from Job experience in life may be helpful, who said,*"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21 NKJV)*

Romans 2:11 says that “there is no partiality with God”? God obviously blesses people in different ways in this life. In the parable of the talents,*"And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. (Matthew 25:15 NKJV)*. In 1Corinthians 12:7-11, we are told that the Spirit is manifested to Christians “for the common good” and “just as He wills” Read 1Corinthians 12:7-11.

Some members seem to be “appointed” to specific task, whereas others are not so assigned. See 1Corinthians 12:28-31.

In the same vein, one righteous man may receive “love” and another may experience “hatred”. **We should understand “love” in this context represents the good things or blessings in this life, “hatred” represents an absence of those blessings in one’s life.** God does not hate anyone, but He may seem to provide fewer blessings for some.....(love them less).

"The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How hast thou loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." (Malachi 1:1-3 RSV)

see also Roman 9:13-16. ..."The words of Scripture are-'I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau.' What are we to say, then? Is God guilty of injustice? Heaven forbid! For his words to Moses are-'I will take pity on whom I take pity, and be merciful to whom I am merciful.' So, then, all depends, not on human wishes or human efforts, but on God's mercy". (Romans 9:13-16 TCNT)

The Scriptures teach that God loves everybody (John 3:16).

Common Destiny for Man – Death; verses 2 & 3

Death is inevitable for all (9:2). All will die (Hebrew 9:27), both the righteous and the wicked. There is no providential treatment to anyone on death. It is a common destiny for mankind. Solomon emphasized his point with five contrasting couplets:

The righteous/ the wicked – both suffer same fate, death

The clean/ the unclean - both suffer same fate, death

One who does/ does not offer sacrifices—both suffer same fate, death

A good man /a sinner—both suffer same fate, death

A swearer/ one afraid to swear—both suffer same fate, death

The rich / the poor—both suffer same fate, death (my addition)

With our human thinking, we may think those that are righteous or spiritually incline should be given special favour, sadly it is the same for all. "All suffer the one fate" of dying.

Death, according to Solomon, is a universal "evil"; it strikes men everywhere (under the sun, 9:3a).

The New Testament teaches that death is a power of the devil and sin {Hebrews 2:14; 1Corinthians 15:53-57}. The realisation that all die has led ungodly people to adopt two dangerous philosophies which impact the heart (9:3b).

- i. Some allow their hearts to become,, full of evil." They do not restrain themselves, but plunge into sinful excess. **Read Romans 1:24-32.** Evil unchecked results in more evil. **The uncontrolled heart can be overtaken by evil..**
- ii. Some allow insanity to dwell in their heart. While all sin might be viewed as irrational, it can be argued that some sin is at least understandable. People

may have reasons for making sinful choices; for example, it might be understandable that a faithful brother would go to court against a brother who has mistreated him: yet, according to **1 Corinthians 6:1-8**, that would be sinful. However, having no fear of God or judgment that awaits man, leads to “insanity”. “Those who are given to such illogical, unreasonable, and irrational behaviour do evil and never change “throughout their lives”. Example a ritualist that uses his parent or relatives for money ritual – it's all insanity!

The Scripture indicates that Evildoers are not wise. They fail to think about the consequences of their actions. It is tragic when man foolishly ignore God's evidences and then die in this ignorance (“*after that they go to the dead*”; 9:3c).

Paul said they are ,without excuse in **Romans 1:18-20**).

So, too, there is a revelation from Heaven of the Divine Wrath against every form of ungodliness and wickedness on the part of those men who, by their wicked lives, are stifling the Truth. This is so, because what can be known about God is plain to them; for God himself has made it plain. For ever since the creation of the universe God's invisible attributes-his everlasting power and divinity-are to be seen and studied in his works, so that men have no excuse; (Romans 1:18-20 TCNT)

Hope Remains while one is Living – v 4-6

Hope remains while one is living, he still has opportunity to do something good with his life (9:4). The living could repent or correct areas of their shortcomings. Solomon offered an illustration from the animal kingdom. Even though lions were exalted, {there are mighty among beasts and perceived as king of animals} (see **Proverbs 30:30**) and dogs were viewed with disgust (see Exodus 22:31), Solomon observed that „a live dog is better than a dead lion.“ **Life offers a distinct advantage!**

The living have the advantage of “Knowing they will die” (9:5a). What benefits does this knowledge bring? **It should bring a sense of urgency to do something positive with whatever time is left.** If one is opportune to witness a dying man on his sick bed sobbing for his mistakes in life, all he wishes is another opportunity to rewrite his wrongs! Such opportunity may never come, but we that are full of life have great opportunities to rewrite our wrong. I may not know areas you are struggling in your spiritual and domestic life, but today offers another opportunity to rewrite those wrongs.

“Take great care, then, how you live – not unwisely but wisely, Making the most of every opportunity; for these are evil days. Therefore do not grow thoughtless, but try to understand what the Lord's will is.” (Ephesians 5:15-17 TCNT)

Solomon made several observations about the dead.

1. He noted that the dead do not know anything that takes place with the living (9:5b). Some false teachers have misunderstood Solomon to say the dead are unable to think (because they have been annihilated); rather, Solomon meant that the dead are unaware of what is happening on the earth. The rich man in Luke 16 had a memory of his five brothers, but he had no idea of the course their lives might take from that point forward (Luke 16:27-31).
2. Solomon stated that the dead “no longer have a reward” (9:5c). Verse 6 explained this phrase clearer where Solomon said the dead “no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun. “In other words, the profitable activities in which they were engaged (before they died) can no longer profit them. What good would it do to bring money to a dead man’s grave? (expand) Whatever he did with his life, good or evil, that life was his only opportunity to do anything.
3. Solomon observed that the “memory“ of the dead “is forgotten“ (9:5d). This is one of the harsh realities of life. A person who dies will soon fade from the memories of the living. There is a familiar adage that says “out of sight, out of mind.“ The memories of the deceased will not be sufficient to effect change upon the living. **This lifetime offers the only opportunity to make an impact for good. I encourage all to make it happen; life is good** (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13). To be happy and do good while we live are worthy goals for life, but we can pursue them in the wrong way. God wants us to enjoy life. When we have the proper view of God, we discover that we find real pleasure in whatever we have as gifts from God, not in what we accumulate.
4. Solomon states that the “love....hate and ...zeal“ of the dead “have already perished“ (9:6a). whether the deceased was known as a benevolent person, showing love to others, or as a spiteful and hateful person, that reputation is unchangeable after death. The dead can neither undo nor redo what was done.
5. Solomon noted that “they will no longer have a share in all that is done“ (9:6b). One who is dead can no longer profit from the labour that is done on earth. The need to take advantage of today is expressed as a biblical truth, for there may be no tomorrow. **„but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin“.** (Hebrews 3:13 NKJV) {see also Isaiah 55:6; 2Corinthians 6:1,2}

Conclusion

Solomon was not discussing the afterlife or one’s eternal abode in this section. The focus is on what a person does with the one life he has been given. It would be a mistake to base our beliefs on the afterlife on his comments here. Solomon was making these observations from an earthly perspective....under the sun. After we die, we cannot change what we have done; we can’t suddenly plan to become better people. Resurrection to a new life after death was a vague concept for Old

Testament believers. This reality and hope were only made clear after Jesus rose from the dead.