

“The moment a person accepts responsibility for other people—and only in so doing does the person live in reality—the genuine ethical situation arises.” (Bonhoeffer)

- ii. Who stands before you suffering about whom you say, “But they deserve their own plight”? Or, “They are not our problem; they are their own problem”?

LIVE THE STORY

The Gospel is intended to be learned and lived in community. The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

- Explain why the question of the sermon title must be seen as one question and not two.
- What is the Preacher’s answer to the question, “Who can find what is right and wise?” Can he? Can we? Is this not the quest that was begun in the Garden (Gen. 3:1-8)? If so, what does that say to us?
- Do you ever struggle with the issue stated in v15? Are you tempted to either give up, or become overly zealous for righteousness?
- How does the woman of v26 point us toward the woman folly (in contrast to the virtuous woman) of Proverbs?
- What exactly does the Preacher tell us that he found in his search in verses 27-29? Why do you think some scholars have suggested that this section has a comedic aspect to it?
- What might 1 Corinthians add to the discussion of “What is right and wise?”
- Looking at the first Bonhoeffer quote, what do you think is the difference he is highlighting between figuring out “what is good” and “what is the will of God”? How can this be helpful today? (Say when applied to wearing masks or not.)
- How does the cross teach us about what the will of God is when we stand before a person in need?

Who Can Find What is Right and Wise?

Jerry Cisar — June 21, 2020

Text: Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

Introduction

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*: “Any science, philosophy, or knowledge which supposes that it can stand on its own pretensions, and can leave God out of its assumptions, becomes its own opposite, and disillusiones everyone who builds his expectations on it.... [such philosophy] lives in the hope that by means of continued serious investigation it will solve the riddle of the world. But... disillusionment enters in. So far from decreasing, the problems increase as the study proceeds. What seemed to be self-evident proves to be a new mystery, and the end of all knowledge is then again the sad and sometimes despairing confession that man walks about on earth in riddles, and that life and destiny are mysteries.”

I. I’ve Seen It All (15-18)

A. “*Everything* I have seen, in the days of my futility.” (7:15)

- i. The righteous perish; the wicked live long.
- ii. There are two temptations that often accompany this:
 - a) *Do not be overly righteous (16).*
 - b) *Be not overly wicked, neither a fool (17).*

B. Nonetheless, Engage Life Fully! (18)

- i. It is literally: It is good that you take hold of this and also from that do not rest (let go) your hand, because the one who fears the Lord will come out from them all.
- ii. In other words, “Don’t quit just because things don’t work out all the time. *Take life by the reigns and do what you can; the one who fears God will come out from all those troubles.*”

C. An Interlude (19-21)

- D. The Preacher’s exasperation seems to find some conclusion, but is it satisfactory?

II. I’ve Found Nothing (23-29)

- A. The question, “Who Can Find What is Right and Wise?” is evidently not the Preacher!
- B. Then he goes on to describe his search for what is beyond him...
 - i. Who is this troublesome woman?
 - ii. Proverbs 31
 - iii. v27-28a This is when the comedy begins.
 - a) “Here’s what I found... which I didn’t find.”
 - b) The Preacher (masc.) says (fem.).
 - c) *Though wisdom is rare among humans, even in that Lady Wisdom remains elusive.*

- C. What has he found? V29: This alone: God made humanity upright, but they have sought out man schemes (elsewhere used of war machines). These are not good schemes!

III. What Do We Find?

- A. “Knowledge puffs up; love builds up.” (1 Cor. 8:1)
 - i. In all our seeking to find what is right and wise, we have to remember that there isn’t a principle of wisdom that stands alone as the ideal to which all others bow... except this one: the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a) 1 John 3:16
 - b) 1 Corinthians 13:2
 - ii. *If it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me, how do I take up a cross on behalf of this person, and follow Jesus?*

- B. How do I know what is right and wise?

Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*: To pursue the question of a Christian ethic, one is “faced with an outrageous demand—from the outset they must give up, as inappropriate to this topic, the very two questions that led them to deal with the ethical problem: ‘How can I be good?’ and ‘How can I do something good?’ Instead they must ask the wholly other, completely different question: what is the will of God?”

- i. To do right will often lead to being despised and rejected by men. But the knowledge of true good and evil belongs to God, not humanity.

“This means that a human being necessarily lives in encounter with other human beings and that this encounter entails being charged, in ever so many ways, with responsibility for the other human being. History arises out of accepting this responsibility for other human beings or for entire communities or groups of communities.” (Bonhoeffer)