

# It's Crooked and You Can't Straighten It All Out.

Ecclesiastes 7:13 – 8:1  
Halifax: 2 February 2014

## Introduction:

In Ecclesiastes, the Holy Spirit gives us counsel through His servant Solomon to help us learn how to live well in this world.

- Last time, in chapter 7:1-14, he showed us how to live with adversity...
  - He showed us that adversity is not as bad as we often think.
  - In fact, given our present fallen condition and the reality of the coming judgement,
    - Adversity is actually better than ease!
    - It's not as pleasant to be sure, but it is *better* for us.
      - You learn more at a funeral than you do at a 100 birthday parties.
      - That doesn't make birthday parties evil though—
        - It is just that you learn more about the most important things from the hard things.
  - We were advised, therefore, to accept adversity as from God instead of getting angry about it. God uses it to unite us to Christ and to keep us in Christ.
    - That is the conclusion that was reached in verses 13-14...
      - And we left it at that...
      - But I told you that I'd have more to say more about these verses this week because they introduce our next topic,
        - the topic that is covered from verse 13 through chapter 8, verse 1:
        - Namely, we are taught now how to live with injustice—with both events and people that are not just!
  - Take a look!
    - I will begin reading in verse 13.
    - Ecclesiastes 7:13—this is the word of God.

**Ecclesiastes 7:13-8:1: Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? <sup>14</sup> In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing *that will come* after him. <sup>15</sup> I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is a just *man* who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* who prolongs *life* in his wickedness. <sup>16</sup> Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy**

**yourself? <sup>17</sup> Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time? <sup>18</sup> It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all. <sup>19</sup> Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city. <sup>20</sup> For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. <sup>21</sup> Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. <sup>22</sup> For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others. <sup>23</sup> ¶ All this I have proved by**

wisdom. I said, “I will be wise”; but it was far from me. <sup>24</sup> As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out? <sup>25</sup> I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness. <sup>26</sup> And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her. <sup>27</sup> “Here is what I have found,” says

the Preacher, “Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, <sup>28</sup> which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found. <sup>29</sup> Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” <sup>8:1</sup> ¶ Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.”

May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy Word.

- Notice that our text begins with a crooked world and ends with the shining face that belongs to men of wisdom.
- Today in our text, we are taught how to have the shining face of the wise in a crooked world.

So let’s get started...

## **I. Our passage opens with the declaration that things in this world are not right.**

A. As we saw last week, God is the one who made the world crooked!

1. Verse 13 speaks of *what He has made crooked* and calls it *the work of God*...
  - Verse 14 speaks of God appointing *the day of adversity* every bit as much as *the day of prosperity*.
  - The words and their meaning are simple enough to understand, but they are not easy to receive—by many they are completely acceptable!
    - You hear it all the time—
      - “how could a good God even allow—much less appoint birth defects and cancer and storms that wipe out entire civilizations (like the great flood!)?”
  - Our prosperous society holds to the doctrine that Job called the doctrine of silly women...
    - that God ought only to send good things,
      - kittens and flowers and gentle rain;
      - never lions that tear their prey, poison ivy, and hurricanes!
    - No, in their mind those do not come from God...
      - And if they do, then God is not good.
  - Liberal commentators (who reject the Bible) regard these comments of Solomon as the ravings of a frustrated angry man...
    - How could anyone say such things about God?
  - And many conservative commentators (who believe the Bible to be God’s Word) imagine that perhaps Solomon is here speaking like an unbeliever—before he works everything out...

2. But anyone who has listened to the scriptures knows that the entire Bible teaches that our afflictions in this world are only a small taste of the sorrows that God has appointed in eternity!
  - God has cursed mankind because of his sin, and has justly sentenced him to have his part in the Lake of Fire with continual torment forever and ever.
    - This is more and more a rejected doctrine in our day, but Jesus had more to say about everlasting punishment than anyone else!
    - Our modern rejection God's wrath is the doctrine of silly women.
  - If this seems excessive and cruel to us, it is only because we have not even begun to understand the holiness of God.
    - It is no defect in God to judge sin—it is His glory!
      - *The clouds are His chariots and the winds do His will! The flames and the lightnings His pleasure fulfill!*
      - If God wishes to make His wrath and power known in this way, we have no warrant to complain!
        - He is the LORD!

B. And you see in verse 13 that we are also reminded how helpless we are to fix what God has made crooked.

- It brings home this hard truth by asking a question that we all know the answer to...
  - *Who can straighten what He has made crooked?*
- Oh yes, there are lot of efforts to do so—and it is right for us to use whatever abilities God gives us to relieve each other of suffering...
  - We are very thankful that we are given the ability to warm ourselves when it is cold and that doctors have found ways to cure some of our diseases...
    - But the truth is that no matter how much we advance, we continue to have both the day of prosperity and the day of adversity.
    - There is, as Thomas Boston said, a crook in the lot, and no matter how hard we try, we cannot straighten it all out.
  - Verse 14 reminds us that we can't even know what will come after us...
    - We have no control over the future and no way to even predict it...
    - The future is with God.
- As we saw last week, a wise man will not kick against the goads—
  - He will not fight against what God has done, but he will accept the adversity as well as the prosperity that God sends.
    - Not as a fatalist—not at all—for the wise man knows that it is all from God whose grace is abundant and whose salvation he waits for...
    - He resigns to God as His gracious, benevolent, wise, and faithful redeemer who mixes the prosperity and the affliction with perfect wisdom and justice.

- C. But with verse 15, there is a new kind of wrong that is identified!
- That under God's sovereign rule, many never get what they deserve!
1. Under the sun, justice is at times turned completely upside down...
    - Solomon testifies that he has often seen this:
      - **Ecc 7:15: I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.**
    - Have we not all seen it? And it is God who does it!
      - A righteous man like Job has everything go wrong—
        - And don't be overly spiritual here—yes, Job was a sinner—but relatively the Lord Himself declares that Job was blameless and that there was none like him...
        - We know of fine Christian people whose lot it is to suffer one difficulty after another...
          - And sometimes they never see the end of it in this life as Job did.
      - But then we also see wicked men who lie and cheat and steal...
        - And they prosper and never get caught...
        - They are immoral and they smoke and drink and do drugs, but they live to a ripe old age with no sicknesses and die a gentle death.
          - They seem, as Solomon says, to prolong their life by their wickedness.
          - The more they abuse people, the more they prosper!
2. This is a very vexing thing to us.
    - This is something that we struggle with so much as God's people that we are given words to confess our struggle in one of the songs that God has given us sing in the assembly...
    - In Psalm 73, we corporately confess that this makes us stumble:
      - **Psalm 73:1-12: Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. <sup>2</sup> But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. <sup>3</sup> For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. <sup>4</sup> For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. <sup>5</sup> They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. <sup>6</sup> Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. <sup>7</sup> Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. <sup>8</sup> They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. <sup>9</sup> They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. <sup>10</sup> Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. <sup>11</sup> And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" <sup>12</sup> Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches.**
    - Now of course as Psalm 73 goes on, we work it all out...

- We go on in the Psalm to confess that by coming before God in worship, we remember that God will judge the wicked at His appointed time...
  - and that we will be blessed at His appointed time...
  - God has appointed a day when He will judge all sin and set every injustice right.
- But until that time, it is often something we struggle with.
  - We especially struggle with it when we find ourselves in the place of judgment while the wicked prosper around us!
    - Hebrews 11 lists off many of the saints of old—like Moses—who forsook the pleasures of Egypt and choose to suffer affliction with the people of God—
      - all because he had hope in the future blessing of God—in the resurrection.

## II. Here in our text in Ecclesiastes, we are told how to deal with the problem of injustice in this world.

- How can you deal with it?
  - Solomon first tells us two things *not* to do, then he tells us what to do.

### A. First of all, don't be overly righteous.

- Look at verse 16:
  - **Ecc 7:16: Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself?**
- 1. Now of course Solomon does not mean that we could ever be too righteous...
  - Before God, we are full of sin and we are never righteous enough!
    - Solomon knows that and he makes that clear in verse 20 where he says,
      - **Ecc 7:20: For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.**
    - That is not what he is talking about.
- 2. He is talking about the person who takes it upon himself to correct every injustice he sees!
  - a. You know the kind!
    - The secular world has them—the fussy environmentalist who rails on you for breathing too much air and who wants heavy fines for people that don't recycle everything or that leave their computers on at night wasting our precious resources...
    - These folks have all the details and all the statistics and they can rattle them all off to you—that's the overly wise part...
    - You can find them with their different crusades and different causes.
      - There are the animal rights people and the feminists and anti-prayer group...

- b. But sadly these same types are found in the church too...
- 1) They make a big deal out of every little thing, every little wrong...they are appalled and horrified by every infraction.
    - If they hear someone speaking impatiently, they rush in to rebuke them and to threaten them with Matthew 18 if they don't repent.
    - They find out that a new believer was watching a movie that they don't approve of—and they confront him and express doubts about his conversion.
    - They are a pastor and that have blog that constantly denounces all that is wrong with everyone else's theology or practice and they form new denominations every few years until they have to denounce the heretics.
  - 2) Often what is so important to them is not so important to God.
    - Jesus brought this out in Luke 16:15 when He said:
      - **Luke 16:15: You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.**
  - 3) There are different styles of this over righteousness...
    - a) Some of these folks are hard on themselves...
      - They can't enjoy a meal because they are always afraid that they might have eaten too much or had a gluttonous attitude...
      - Or perhaps they said things at the meal that they feel were too light and not in keeping with Christian sobriety.
    - b) Some of them are out to make a show—
      - (i) they go out and hold prayer vigils in the street, even though Jesus said we ought not to pray to be seen by men...
      - (ii) Or they start a crusade against alcohol because some women in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century started blaming it for the nation's ills...
      - (iii) Or they are in a reformed group that writes articles to instruct pastors about their failure if they don't teach all the men in the congregation to smoke and drink.
    - c) Doug Wilson has a nice list for us of over-righteous Christians:
      - Nice Christian. Priggish Christian. Sanctimonious Christian. Tight-shoes Christian. Pursed lips Christian. Stickler Christian. Insufferable Christian. Prudish Christian. Doctrinally correct Christian. Know-it-all Christian. Ostentatious Christian. Quiet-time-every-day-or-I'll-go-to-Hell Christian. Conceited Christian. Orthodox Christian. *UnChristian* Christian.
    - d) But of course there are those who react to all of this too and form their own "Anti-Pharisee" party.
      - These become Anti-Pharisee Pharisees—and there are lots of them.
        - If anyone challenges their doctrine or their life, they immediately launch into a full frontal attack against that person as a desperate Pharisee.

3. Interestingly, Solomon warns you that if you live this way, you end up destroying yourself...
  - And it is true—you become a miserable wretch who completely loses the joy of Christian fellowship and of walking with the Lord.
    - You become like the Pharisees who would see someone healed and find no joy in it, no delight in Christ’s mercy and no marvelling at His power—
      - but anger and frustration because it was done on the Sabbath.
      - Everything is focused on being righteous—and while righteousness is indeed one of the most excellent things about God’s kingdom—it is about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,
        - the righteousness they are looking for is something different than the righteousness that God calls us to pursue.

TRANS> But then there is the opposite error...

B. Do not be overly wicked...Eccl 7:17 says:

- **Ecc 7:17: Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time?**
1. Here is the person that sees all the injustice and how it doesn’t seem to pay to be righteous...
    - so he goes to swim in the other end of the pool...the hedonistic end.
    - He won’t have anything to do with pursuing righteousness—
      - That is a dead end path!
      - He will get all he can out of life.
        - He will be autonomous and free—live for what pleases him without any regard for what God says!
  2. Well, unless he is one of hedonists who brings God into it and makes it a religious duty to be immoral...
    - You know that kind down at the United Church who claim that they are following God who just wants them to be happy.
      - They claim that He gave them their sinful passions, so there is nothing sinful about those passions...
        - If they are attracted to one woman or many, to women or men, to adults or children—what difference does it make?
  3. Solomon warns that if you follow this path you will likely die before your time.
    - It is true that it will not always be the case, but it is usually the case that wicked men do not live out half their days...
      - You see it all the time—the way of transgressor is hard.
      - Even if they do prosper, without gratitude to their Maker, they really never learn to enjoy their prosperity.
        - As Psalm 37:16 says, **The little that the righteous has is more and better far than great abundance many have who wholly wicked are.**

TRANS> So if being overly righteous or overly wicked is not the way to respond to the injustice in the world, how should we respond to it?

- C. Solomon says that you escape both errors by fearing God!
- **Ecc 7:18: It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all [or both].**
1. Solomon makes it clear, as is often the case in scripture, that the truth does not lie in the middle!
    - The answer is not to strike up a balance between self-righteousness and wickedness and live in the dull centre...
      - Sadly, that is what most people do.
      - That is how many people look at verse 16-17—you just strike a balance and don't go to excess.
    - But Solomon is telling us that we need to escape both of these errors completely...
      - When you are in the middle, you just have a mixture of both errors—you have them both at the same time!
      - As is so often the case with God, the answer lies not in balance, but in an entirely different direction!
- And what is that answer?
2. Live in the fear of God!
    - That means that you live in the reality of Him—without the games and the pretenses, without the denials—but before the face of the true and living God!
    - a. And I tell you, when you do that, you will realize how far you are from righteousness!
      - Jesus did not say that the Pharisees had too much righteousness, but rather that they did not have nearly enough!
        - When you begin to really look at your heart and you see all the self-centredness and the bitter thoughts...
        - You see the lack of gratitude to God and the cursing and complaining...
          - You are not going to pretend to be righteous by the making of long prayers or by keeping all the rules...
          - You will see what rubbish any righteousness that you can produce is—because you are dealing with God for real!
      - You will see clearly the truth that Solomon puts forth in verse 20...
        - **Ecc 7:20: that there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.**
        - As Paul put it, you will see that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,
          - both Jews and Greeks,
          - and that all the world is guilty before God.
    - Your own righteousness simply does not cut it with God...



- b. But you will also see what folly it is to cast off His law and join with the hedonists!
    - When you fear God, you tremble before His majesty and judgement.
      - You see that He is a holy God and that you are undone!
      - You have a tremendous respect for His law and for His judgement.
        - You know that it is the height of folly to think that you can run from Him—or pretend that He does not notice or does not care about your sin...
          - He is God!
  - c. When you fear God you realize that the only thing that will help is mercy!
    - His mercy!
      - You become desperate for His grace and salvation!
      - You know that nothing else will do!
    - *You* cannot fix the sin in the world!
      - *You* cannot solve the problems!
      - Nor can you run away from them and pretend they are not there...
    - But the LORD God Almighty can fix them!
      - When you fear Him, you look to Him for the forgiveness that He has promised!
      - You are delighted to hear that Jesus, the Son of God, gave Himself on the cross to atone for your sins!
      - You are delighted to hear that God has promised to pardon all those who come to Him for life...
        - And that God will give His Holy Spirit to you to keep you in His salvation...
        - And that you will share in His resurrection and be enabled to live in His house forever and ever!
3. The fear of God gives you wisdom—it is the beginning of wisdom!
- Solomon gives three examples...
  - a. First, in verse 19, he says that **Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.**
    - You know how politicians always think that they are going to fix things—
      - at least, that is what they promise to do...
      - well when you fear God, you realize that He is the only one who can fix things—and it enables you to deal with problems in way that is more realistic!
  - b. And we have already seen verse 20—
    - It is central to everything that Solomon is saying here...
    - You realize that there are no just men in the earth who do good and do not sin...
    - Again, you are realistic when you reckon with who God is...
      - You stop pretending that you can save yourself and you look to the LORD for salvation.

- But not in a way that you abandon all efforts at reformation!
  - Oh no!
  - You earnestly endeavour to do what God tells us to do for reformation—
    - you pray, you worship, you read His word, you come to His supper, you use church discipline, you follow His commands...
    - But you do it with the full realization that you are a sinner and that everybody else is too!
      - You are in need of His deliverance so you seek it in the way He says to seek it.
- c. And then in verse 21—the fear of God rescues you from pettiness...
  - When you see what you are before a holy God, and when you see how undone we all are,
    - should it really come as any surprise to you that other people will find fault with you?
    - Should that be a big deal to you?
    - Even if they are wrong about a matter, there are worse things that they might have said about you if they knew about them!
      - And besides, you have criticized other people too—both justly and unjustly!
      - So let it go...even if they work for you!
  - That is what Solomon says in verse 21 & 22:
    - **Ecc 7:21-22: Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. 22 For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.**
      - The fear of God has a way of taking you off your high horse and of freeing you from easily getting hurt...
      - What does it matter if other people aren't all that impressed with you?
        - Really!
        - Do they have that much reason to be impressed?
        - Are you trying to put on show?

TRANS> So cut the airs and the pretences and fear God—

- You are a fallen sinner in a fallen world—no joke!
  - Get used to it!

### III. Solomon searched it all out and the conclusion he came to was just that—

- We are all sinners as long as we are in this world and it is only God who can straighten us out—and He won't do it until the appointed time.
- A. He engaged his superior powers and gifts to sort out all the problems...
  1. He was endowed by God with more wisdom than any man...
    - God said so...
    - And he had riches and authority to carry out his research—we have seen all of this before in Ecclesiastes...

2. In verses 23-25 he describes how he employed all of these excellent gifts to search things out...
  - **Ecc 7:23-25: All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise”; but it was far from me. As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out? I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.**
  - But even with all his rich endowments,
    - he was unable to get to the bottom of our condition—to sound out the depths of our folly and foolishness...
    - He says that it is far off and exceedingly deep...
      - Who can find it out?
        - If not him, then who?
    - No brothers and sisters,
      - It is fully beyond us to see the depth of our depravity in this world.
      - There are so many deceitful twists and turns,
        - so many dark and hidden depths—
          - Only God can save us!

B. But Solomon was able to prove *some* things by the wisdom that God gave Him.

1. In verse 23, when he says, “all this I have proved by wisdom,”
  - he is talking about what he had written above—what we have just been looking at:
    - That there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin...
    - And that it is good to be neither overly righteous or overly wicked...
      - but rather to fear God...
  - But what he could not do was to discover the depths of our depravity...
    - only that it was very deep indeed.

TRANS> That is something that he proved by wisdom and that he passes on to us—and then there is more that follows...

2. In verse 26 he tells us of one of the most destructive forces he has found...
  - **Ecc 7:26: And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her.**
  - a. Oh what a terrible thing a seductress is to men in their depravity!
    - She knows just what to do to draw them in to her net...
    - They go with panting excitement, honestly thinking they will find the paradise they yearn for...
      - Just like an unsuspecting animal who rushes for the bait in the snare only to have the terrible jaws close on him.
      - What bondage! What bitterness! What ruination! What sapping of all energy that might have been poured into better things...
        - The man who is entrapped by this is on a treadmill, ever running for more, but never truly satisfied...
          - And he runs and runs and runs and goes deeper and deeper into her pit and he never gets what he really wants.

- And the worst thing is that it often leaves him with an inability to see clearly where the truth is...
  - It shuts him out from the fear of God, in the darkness...
  - The trap closes in on him and he is unable to seek God...
    - He is a prisoner forever to his own lusts even though he is never satisfied with them...
    - His greatest satisfaction comes from supposing that he will be satisfied.
- b. Ladies and gentlemen, what Solomon puts his finger on here is no side issue—
  - I spoke to a couple of pastor friends—godly men—at a pastor’s conference recently,
    - and all three of us agreed that men in the grip of the seductress is the number 1 problem we have to deal with in our congregations.
      - Not usually a seductress in the congregation—but the seductress outside who attracts foolish men like flies into her trap!
  - I urge you men, listen to Solomon’s warning here and in Proverbs!
    - Keep your feet far from her door!
      - Warn your sons of this danger!
      - It will consume their souls!
      - It will prevent them from feasting on the heavenly manna and leave them frantically lapping up the cesspool in the septic tank.
  - Men, there is no liberty here!
    - Don’t believe the lies!
    - You do not find paradise by escaping from God into the arms of a seductress!
      - God turns men He hates over to this snare to destroy them!
        - It is like handing them over to the dungeon to await their destruction.
      - Yes, He humbles His elect here too—but how do you know which you are if you are in pursuit of this wretched idol!
        - How do you know that you will be able to escape?
        - Many are her victims who never escape.
        - Flee from it before it is too late!
    - Solomon himself had been caught in this snare and had by God’s grace returned to the assembly of the saints with repentance and remorse!
      - Praise God for His marvellous mercy!
        - If you are in this pit, cry out to God to rescue your poor little yearning soul!
        - It is so excellent to know that there is forgiveness and deliverance in Christ if you will only come to Him!

➤ And what else did Solomon find in his quest to understand wickedness?

3. He found that faithful people were very rare...virtually non-existent...
  - a. In verses 27-28, he says that in his whole court, he found only one man in a thousand (perhaps it was Nathan the prophet?) and no women that were upright.
    - 1) He had 1000 women in his harem, and is it really any wonder that by foolishly acquiring women in this way,
      - he did not find any that were upright?
      - He knew that there were such women, for he praised them again and again in Proverbs...
        - And even said that a virtuous woman was worth *far more than rubies!*
        - But when he went astray, the women he acquired were women from idolatrous nations with whom he made alliances...
    - 2) His overall assessment is very bleak—one upright person in two thousand...
      - And how true this is...
        - Where are the faithful ones?
        - Where is the person who can truly be trusted?
        - Where is the one who does not disappoint?
      - Faithfulness is very hard to find.
  - b. Sin has come into the world and it is spread to all men from Adam!
    - As Solomon says in verse 29...
      - **Ecc 7:29: Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.**
    - This is an important theological truth—and it gives us hope to know that we were not created in sin...
      - We are corrupted by our own doing—
        - And God will restore His elect to uprightness!
        - If you come to Him for His salvation, He will not reject you.
  - c. But in the meantime, get used to it!
    - If Solomon could not straighten them all out, neither can you.
      - You have to leave them in God's hands.
        - Yes, He has given you the means of grace—you can pray for them and you can minister the word to them...
          - But God must give the increase!
      - And besides, look at your own record!
        - who are you to complain about the unfaithfulness of others?
          - You can't even straighten yourself out...
          - You don't even know the depths of your own depravity...
          - If you are a true believer, you are waiting for Him to change you!
            - You know that salvation must come to you in Christ...

- So be merciful, tender-hearted, and ready to forgive.
  - Be patient and give them time to grow.
  - Parents, elders, managers,
    - whoever you are,
      - yes, use the discipline that God has put into your hands—some of you a terribly negligent of that...
      - And use the means of grace that He has given you—the word, prayer, and sacraments...
      - But do not be harsh and do not feel that you must right every wrong.
- Fear God!
  - Truly live before His face—yearning for His word, doing what you do as in His sight...
    - And you will live in wisdom.

**Conclusion:**

And what will be the result of this wisdom?

- This wisdom will, as it says in verse 1 of chapter 8,
  - cause your face to shine. It will change the sternness of your face...
  - It will take away the hardness of disappointment, and burden that comes when you take it upon yourself to right all the wrongs...
    - It will replace that stern face with the hope of joy—that hope that comes when you look to the LORD to deliver!

How much more occasion do we have for such joy now that we see what God has done in fulfilment of His promise to save us...

- That He has sent His only Son to die on the cross for us—to atone for our sins...
- And that He has poured out the Holy Spirit who keeps us and who transforms us and will perfectly transform us at last to be like Jesus!
  - Yes, sin is a pain and a disappointment—people will let you down...justice will often never be done in the world...
    - But lift up your eyes to the Lord and rejoice in His salvation!