



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Four Kinds of Evil in Our World (Ecclesiastes 4)

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There is a reality in every society. Some try to ignore it; some try to explain it away; some admit that it exists and confront it. That reality is evil. The reason it is present in every human community is because of the nature of humanity. The prophet Jeremiah described it this way: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) In the New Testament, the apostle John agreed when he wrote, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8)

Just in the past few days we have seen an example of our world's evil within the General Assembly family when Del. Swain was assaulted and robbed. It is around us and is the human condition. We can do nothing about it.

If I sound defeatist, believe me, I'm not. I believe there is an answer and cure for this natural human condition. Otherwise, I might as well stop this study right now. As we come to Ecclesiastes chapter 4, some other examples of evil are presented. But before we proceed there is a major point about evil we must see.

How do we know something is evil? For that matter, how do we know something is right and just? If one believes the world and its inhabitants are nothing more than an accident of nature, particles that have somehow arranged themselves into a complex system of life and consciousness, there are no rules. There can be no real evil, since there is no real standard to which we are held accountable. If chaos reigned and only the fittest survived, who is to say what is right and what is wrong?

That is why we must be pointed to the Scriptures, given to us by the One who created and designed all there is. He has revealed Himself and His morality. It is to Him we are and will be held accountable. For that reason, we must understand how God defines evil and good. It is not up to us to make that call.

I. THE EVIL OF OPPRESSION (4:1-3)

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 - Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

These are strong words coming from a political leader who had the very opportunity to oppress if he chose. For anyone in a political office, the first verses of this chapter should serve as a reminder that oppression of the innocent should never be a function of government. Solomon saw it and we still see it today. Citizens should be expected to follow just laws, but the unfairness of the powerful oppressing the powerless is unacceptable.

God himself instituted human government and its authority. Providing security for its citizens, rewarding good and punishing wrongdoers are at the heart of its purpose. Oppression in any form is a violation of that sacred purpose.

The Bible has much to say about oppression, mainly because Israel experienced so much of it. God hates this lack of goodwill from those in power, as Solomon writes elsewhere.

Proverbs 14:31 Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

Proverbs 28:16 A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.

II. THE EVIL OF WORKAHOLISM (4:4-6)

Ecclesiastes 4:4-6 - Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

The wisdom in these verses is profound and finds clear application in the political arena. The issue of work is a central one to our lives and brings many questions with it. Where should I work? How much should I work? What are the goals of my work? What motivates my work? What am I willing to sacrifice for my work?

Solomon watched many people work and observed many different answers given to the questions above. He also drew conclusions that help us all in our pursuit of a healthy view of work and wealth-accumulation.

First, trying to keep up with the Joneses is a lousy reason to work, according to Solomon. Envy of your neighbor will eat you alive, we are warned. It's a waste of time – or in Solomon's words, a chasing of the wind.

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Next, he tells us balance is the key. To give up and fold your hands is the mark of a fool. Not working is not the answer. But as we work, contentment with appropriate rest goes much further than the stress that being a workaholic brings. What is the danger in overwork?

It's no longer satisfying. It's now demanding. It's a slavery, in fact. It's disillusioning, and a person hates it. But he can't get out of it because he has to keep paying the freight. And so the home becomes part of the rivalry. And finally the whole thing goes up in smoke. Why? Because enough is never enough.¹

Proverbs 15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.

III. THE EVIL OF ISOLATION (4:7-12)

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 - Again, I saw vanity under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

What a sad phrase describing the person "who has none other". Choosing isolation from people so that one can chase after the fleeting pleasures of this world is a pathetic trade.

Obviously, pulling together works better. You've seen that in campaigning. It takes a great team performing different functions to achieve a win. It's true in family, in friendships, in work, in every aspect of life. No person is an island and we weren't designed to operate alone.

Life is not just making a living or performing a function. It is experiencing the delight of people. Cultivate and protect your friends. Develop friendships with willful acts of enjoyment. Protect your friends by constant acts of courtesy and sensitivity. Make sure that you stay in touch with people.²

Isolation can be a tremendous evil that creeps up slowly, but announces itself loudly when we need it the least. We must avoid the

lie that we can do it all on our own, treating others any way we want, thinking that there are no consequences.

IV. THE EVIL OF AMBITION (4:13-16)

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 - Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

The evil of ambition is that it does not deliver what it promises. For the one who climbs to the top, using whatever means possible, there may be days of prestige and accolades. Solomon enjoyed days like that. But he also saw the end of a ruler's ambition – what it ultimately provides.

A king by his folly and willfulness comes to be impoverished. Though he was born in his kingdom, came to it by inheritance, though he has lived to be old in it and has had time to fill his treasures, yet if he take ill courses, and will no more be admonished as he has been, thinking, because he is old, he is past it, he becomes poor; his treasure is exhausted, and perhaps he is forced to resign his crown and retire into privacy.³

All those in governmental leadership must consider this trap carefully. The lure of power and pull of prominence can blind anyone who is not vigilant against the natural pride of the human heart. But according to these verses, people are fickle and will turn quickly, never fully being capable of satisfaction. If you are dependent on the approval of constituents, you have built your happiness on a sandy foundation.

¹ Swindoll, Chuck. *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Word Books: Waco, TX, 1985), p. 122.

² Nelson, Tommy. *A Life Well Lived* (B & H Publishing: Nashville, TN, 2005), p. 68.

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