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# Struggles, Part 1

## Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:4

*Russ Kennedy*

In this world under the sun, there will be great struggles and striving. This world is a broken place. People are both broken and sinful. Things breakdown. Institutions fail. There is the endless but not hopeless repetitions in our lives and of our tasks.

In this world under the sun, there will be great struggles and striving. There is hard work to do. There is long seasons and times of weariness and frustrations.

In this world under the sun, there will be great struggles and striving. We will want, desire, crave for many things. Many will be good things. Some will not be. Since God is in control and is weaving all our story into His great story, then what about these struggles?

### **The Struggle for Justice (3:16-17)**

<sup>16</sup> Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. <sup>17</sup> I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

#### ***In the Corruption of Justice (v. 16)***

In the place of justice there is wickedness. The effect is that justice then is corrupted. Where do you go for justice when wickedness rules from the bench? In the place of righteousness there was wickedness. These two statements are parallel. The place of justice and the place of righteousness are the same place. The law and legislation should be applied rightly so that people can have justice. But wickedness has filled the place where justice and righteousness should hold sway.

When there is no justice, then the innocent are vulnerable to false charges. The law was designed to protect the innocent. The Mosaic Law had strict measures to determine the truth of a charge and tilted justice towards shielding those who were innocent of the charge.

When there is no justice, then the victims have little or no recourse. The Law will not serve them well when the judges are corrupt. In almost every nation where legislation and law is important, law will only benefit of just is properly served.

When there is no justice, then the guilty are not punished. Judges were to mete out the punishment that was deserved and fit the crime or the wrong. But if the guilty go free, then people will lose respect for the law and will do everything they can to undermine it.

When there is no justice, then the lawless will control. They may not have direct control of the levers of power, but they will live without the proper fear that restrains behavior. They will defy the law and live as a law to themselves.

Israel as a nation lived under the Mosaic Law. It provided a legislative framework for all of life. Sadly, the justice under that law was often corrupted. Some of the Jewish kings

made reforms, but the general trajectory in all human legislation is towards either more strict, dictatorial, controlling law or the lack of enforcement of the good laws that are on the books.

In our society, we live under law as well. We do not live under the Mosaic Law though much of our law system is a marriage of the Bible and humanism. Now it is messy porridge of sometimes even conflicting legal theories. The law, which is supposed to protect life and property, is selectively applied. Justice is bleeding in the streets. Witness the plight of the unborn. Tiny beating hearts of innocent pre-born babies have been stilled for the convenience of women and men. Don't talk to be about "choice". This is murder. Plain and simple. The doctors ought to be charged as murderers. Any one who is involved as co-conspirators including the medical staff and mothers. Would abortion continue? Sure. But not at 100,000 a year. In our country, as in most of the "civilized" world today, the pre-born people have no recourse, no protection, no justice. Maybe, just maybe, a step in the right direction is being made by the present governor of Ohio.

### ***In the Correction of Justice (v. 17)***

Make no mistake, justice will be corrected. One day, God will judge all. Please understand this. No sin will go unpunished. Justice will be meted out and at a time when there will be no appeal, no mitigating circumstances. The judgment will be absolutely just. The incarceration will be in the Lake of Fire. The degree of punishment will be proportionate to the lawless life lived. All sin will be dealt with. But today, I want to remind you that the murder of preborns will also be judged. Each act recorded in God's book of indictment. Each one will accrue so that some doctors in the west will be guilty of as many murders as the worst of the SS under Hitler.

Why is this so? There is a time and season for judgment as well. There is time to be born. There is a time to die. After death, at the end of days when all days are ended, at that day in that season, there will be judgment. Sometimes, we do not have to wait. Sometimes the escalating lawlessness and crime is its own judgment. Sadly though, often the innocent and the victim are swept away as well.

Sin has been judged at the cross for believers. Sinners will be judged at the last day. There is a time for Jesus on the cross; and a time for Jesus on the throne. If you committed a horrible sin in your past, and you have repented, believed and bowed to Jesus, rejoice. The highlighting of the horror of your past sin should not increase your weight of guilt and vain regret; it should amplify your gratitude for the stunning grace of God that punished Jesus in your place, forgave you totally and set you free. No forgiven person should walk out of this room this day feeling a weight of guilt. You should feel the joy of forgiveness and gratitude for Jesus who suffered for you, bled for you, paid your penalty, took your shame and guilt. Right now, at this moment, like Christian in Pilgrim's progress let the weight of your guilt roll off you and roll down into the grave. Know the new life of the resurrection and shining clothes of righteousness and go no more into the slough of despair.

## The Struggle for Significance (3:18-22)

The reason justice has fallen to wickedness is because of a false view of humanity.

<sup>18</sup> I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. <sup>19</sup> For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. <sup>20</sup> All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. <sup>21</sup> Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? <sup>22</sup> So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

### ***Its False Assertion (v. 18)***

Solomon says in his heart what other people are saying. The perversion of justice happens because people believe there is no essential difference between humans and beasts. There is no difference in the quality of being. The aim of this test that God is doing is to show man that he is acting like the beasts. We see more and more how depravity degrades people's conduct to the level of beasts.

### ***Its Misinterpreted Facts (v. 19-21)***

Why do people think this?

Their death is the same (v. 19a) They observe that the death of beasts and humans is simply the same. Both die, decay and return to dust. So there must be no real difference in the essence. If we are but upright apes then the death of beasts and persons has no real difference.

Their life is the same (v. 19b) Beasts and humans breathe. Their physical life seems to be experienced and sustained the same way. There doesn't seem to be a real difference in their life force, their animating power. So, there is no real difference between beasts and humans.

Their end is the same (v. 20) It appears to unbelievers that beasts and humans have the same end. They die and become dust. No beast lives forever. No human lives forever. Since neither live forever then they must be the same.

Their destination is uncertain (v. 21) The unbeliever observes that beasts and humans have personality, an animating spirit. What is that spirit? Where does it go when the body dies? If there is a spirit, how can we know where it does go? Are the claims of the Bible true?

They only go by what they see and assume that is all there is. This is the problem with science. It can only observe what it can see. So it make may observations that are true in itself. But the conclusions can be totally wrong. What can be seen is not all there is.

### ***Its General Conclusion (v. 22)***

Here is the problem. The logic appears not to work. How is the conclusion derived from the argument? How is the "so", meaningful?

This is actually the *counter* argument. This is what the Christian Realist concludes. There is injustice in this world. Many people live no better than beasts. But there is significance and importance to our work, our life, our doing. It is a great and good thing. After all,

what will follow our end? We do know what is after our end. We will be facing God. That makes all the difference.

## **The Struggle of the Oppressed (4:1-3)**

We saw the struggle for justice. Now Solomon fuses on the struggle of the oppressed. This is parallel to that section.

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. <sup>3</sup> But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

### ***Their Personal Pain (v. 1)***

Where justice fails, people are oppressed. Notice the parallels here in 3:16-17. It is the suffering of the oppressed that is noted here. Their tears are squeezed out by the oppression that afflicts them. Solomon can see this every day in the slums of Jerusalem. I have seen it all over the world where people live under deep, heavy, dark oppression.

There are many kinds of oppression and many kinds of suffering. Much of it cannot be relieved in this life. Some can. But that there is none to comfort makes it all the worse.

I want to say something and I want you to listen carefully to me. Sometimes when we take our small issues, our self-focused troubles, our difficult relationships and speak of being oppressed, we are demeaning the actual meaning of the word and the terrible suffering it is describing. Like many things here in our plush, rich, self-absorbed west, we have all different classes of "oppressed people." I am quite skeptical. The bar for being oppressed here is quite low. Let us be ready to comfort those who are truly oppressed. Let us not respond to oppression of ourselves in ways that mirror the world.

### ***Their Terrible Plight (v. 2)***

It would have been better to be dead. There are people all over the world whose suffering and miseries at the hand of their government or mobs or gangs is so intense, death would be preferable. While it is not polite for Christians to voice this, there are times when, if we are realistic, some could say, "I'd rather be dead." Now that may be realistic, but it is not a response that pleases God. Moses and Elijah came to a point like this. They thought they were "oppressed". They weren't. But their isolation and burdens were so heavy and their thinking so unbiblical that they were willing for God slay them.

### ***The Tragic Conclusion (v. 3)***

Better are those who had never been born. It is interesting to me how these two sayings have come into common speech. But it is a common human sentiment when contemplating the suffering under oppression. But to say, in this season of life, that it would be better not to have been born is to speak against God.

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## Reflect and Respond

The essence of these struggles is between whether we will live for others or live for ourselves. When our life is about self-pursuit we are doomed to depression. There is no finding oneself in a search for one self. We are truly greatest when we lose ourselves in others.

Let us be glad for the struggles in our life. They will wean our souls from deep holdings in this world. They will point our eyes to Christ. They will cause us to long for eternity.

Let me remind those of you who have had or have had a someone get an abortion. Do not carry a load of guilt or van regret. If you have repented and asked for God's forgiveness, you are forgiven. Period. Relish the forgiveness God grants in grace. Do not tarnish the bright jewel of God's loving forgiveness by running it through the mud of your guilt.

Today we are in a great struggle. A struggle for unborn. They have no voice of their own, few to defend their life and their cause. Today, while abortion is legal and real in our country, is not moral. It is a great tragedy all over the western world. We stand against abortion. We stand with women who are willing to be helped to become mothers.

It is my privilege to introduce Tiffany Siefman of the Miami Valley Women's Center. We have asked her to come share about the work and ministry there.