

**Ecclesiastes 7: 13 and 14; “Consider the Work of God”,
A Bible Study prepared for December 8th, 2010, and presented
to those gathered at the Rendall home by Pastor Paul Rendall.**

We saw last time that we were together that it is a faulty view of life which looks at the past and says, “Why were the former days better than these days” in which we now live? It is a faulty view of life because it is unwise in what we are looking at. We are looking at things from the standpoint of our outward peace and prosperity only. We are not considering God’s purpose in ordaining that things be this way. It is unwise because we are not considering the sovereignty of God over all things; all nations, all people (righteous and unrighteous), and all the situations that we find ourselves in. God is causing “all things to work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8: 28) And yet, we as believers often forget this mighty truth. This is why Solomon, the Preacher, says in verse 11 that “wisdom is good with (or as) an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun.” “Wisdom is a defense even as money is a defense.” Both should be stored up as they are sought for by men, and given by God. God stores up sound wisdom for the upright in heart,” it says in Proverbs 2: 7; “He is a shield to those who walk uprightly.” The wise person will seek for sound wisdom from God’s mouth, and they will store it up as riches to their needy soul. This truth must be remembered by all Christians, believed by all Christians, and lived out by all Christians. The excellence of this knowledge, it says in verse 12 of Ecclesiastes 7, “is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.” So ask yourself this question as we proceed through this study: Do I have this sound wisdom which God gives to those who seek Him? Or am I a complaining Christian who is prone to blaming other people for my not having what I think would be the most satisfying situation in life? You should know that your complaint is not with people around you. Your complaint is with God. Verse 13 says, “Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?”

The truth that we want to receive this evening is this: The Christian, by the grace of Christ, is to consider carefully, and respond righteously to, all of the work of God in their life. We will consider first the truth that no one, Christian or non-Christian can make straight what God has made crooked. We will consider secondly the appropriate response to this crookedness, and thirdly we will briefly look at the goal which God has in appointing things for us in this way.

1st – Let us consider the truth that no one, Christian or non-Christian can make straight what God has made crooked. (Verse 13)

“Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?” This is a truly amazing verse of Scripture, and one which many persons, both Christian and unbelieving may balk at. There are many people who think of God as a God who is always and only giving all people what they need and what

they like to experience in their life. God is the only true and living God and since He is essentially good in His nature, they believe that He is the God who always and only makes things straight; He never makes things crooked. But this verse entirely contradicts that view. God, besides making things straight; making things that are orderly and pleasant in terms of the experience of our life; also can, and does at times, take things which are orderly and pleasant and puts a crook into them. Turn with me to Amos Chapter 3, verse 6. "If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?" "If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?" Look also at Isaiah 45: 6 and 7. "That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me." "I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I the Lord, do all these things." The Lord not only does these things in regard to His governing whole nations and societies of men; but He also very particularly ordains all things crooked in regard to individual people. We are not talking about His ordaining that they be sinfully crooked, for God is not the author of sin. But we are speaking about things which are difficult or unpleasant to deal with or to face, either in ourselves or others. Look at Exodus Chapter 4, verse 10. God had called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, but Moses was resisting this call because of how he saw his own ability to speak. "Then Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.'" "So the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth?' "Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind?" "Have not I, the Lord?" Still Moses resists, but God will have His way with him. You can see here that every talent or gift to be able to do something well is from God, and every inability to do something well is also from God. The physical defects of being mute, deaf, seeing or blind are all from the hand of God in connection with his purposes.

Thomas Boston calls this "the crook in the lot", and he has written a very powerful and fascinating treatise by the same name which I would highly recommend for your perusal. (Vol. 3 of his works, P. 497) But the crook in the lot of any person, or any Christian, is something that goes farther than what God has created. It extends to God's providential ordering of all things difficult in our lives. The crook is something which hinders that person's being able to think and to say that everything is fine and well with them and their life. It is something in their person or their situation in life which God has given them; which God has ordained for them to have. It is something that they wish that they could change, but they cannot change it, no matter how much they try. It is not as though God cannot change it, or that He could not have ordained things differently, but He did not. Let us confess at the outset that God is wise in everything that He does and gives. Sometimes He brings these crooks in order that we might be saved from our sins, or turn from them. Turn with me to Isaiah Chapter 55, verse 8. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord." God,

in other words, has many great things to accomplish in our lives, and He will accomplish them whether we believe Him or if we do not. It is our responsibility to believe that all that He says and does is good. (Psalm 145: 17 – The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works.) But notice that in verse 6 we are told to “Seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near.” God will have mercy and will abundantly pardon. It is true that the kindness and goodness of the Lord are meant to lead us to repentance. But so are the crooked things that He sometimes brings.

Let us remember that in giving these crooks, that God’s providence is constantly and continually working with His purpose. Sometimes a crook is with a person for life; sometimes it is only a trial for a period of time; but the person must work with it for that time which the Lord has appointed for them. The crook is intended by God as a learning experience for each and every believer. It is given so that we might trust in God for every good thing in our living our life to Him. This includes all that is difficult and unpleasant; the things that do not make sense to us; the things which seem to put us at a great disadvantage in our being satisfied with our life, and even our thinking that we can glorify God while in this state and condition. Look at Job 12, verse 7 with me. “But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you.” “Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?” Now look at verse 13. “With Him are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding.” “If He breaks a thing down, it cannot be rebuilt; if He imprisons a man, there can be no release.” “If He withholds the waters they dry up; If he sends them out they overwhelm the earth.” “With Him are strength and prudence.” “The deceived and the deceiver are His.” “He leads counselors away plundered, and makes fools of the judges.” “He loosens the bond of kings, and binds their waist with a belt.” “He leads princes away plundered, and overthrows the mighty.” “He deprives the trusted ones of speech, and takes away the discernment of the elders.”

You can see from this that God appoints a great variety of crooks among the children of men. Unfortunately, some people compare themselves with other people, and they conclude that they are either better off or worse off than their neighbor based upon what crook in life is theirs. This is missing the point. God has a crook for you. The crook is your opportunity to learn more of the ways of God. You might conclude that it is some sin which has brought a crook into your life when it is not the case. Look at John chapter 9, verse 1. “Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.” “And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.’” You and I must understand that we, as Christians, are called to wrestle with God Himself in these trials even as Jacob

wrestled with the Angel, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ at the fords of the Jabbok. (Genesis 32) God would have you who believe in Him to prevail with Him in this matter. But God will be with you to bring glory to Himself through your learning to wrestle with your crooked lot. He will be with you to help you and to teach you in regard to what you should do, in regard to your having this crooked lot.

Secondly – Let’s consider the appropriate response to this crookedness which God makes. (Verse 14)

Crooks sometimes come as result of the sin of a person, and sometimes they do not. God brings the crooked lot in our life to achieve his purposes in either case. And His purposes may be manifold. Indeed, usually they are. Let us take the case of the Apostle Paul as a way for us to learn how to respond to crooks in our life. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians Chapter 12. Here we find that the great apostle had a tendency to a particular temptation to sin which the Lord took notice of, and dealt with by giving him a crook in his lot. Verse 1 – “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast.” “I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.” “And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” “Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.” “For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth.” “But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.” “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.” “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.” “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’” “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake.” “For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

This is one of the most amazing passages in all of the word of God. It goes so contrary to our flesh; it goes so contrary to how the world would think of crooks in the lot. Paul is probably speaking of himself when he describes the “man in Christ” in verse 2 who had received these visions and revelations. He says that he will boast in such a man; yet of himself he would not boast or be a fool. He will refrain from boasting of having such visions, and refer to himself as if speaking in the third person, so that people might know the reality of his situation. The reality was, that because of this tendency to boast of the revelations given to him, that the Lord knew that Paul might become “exalted above measure” in his own eyes, and so He gave to Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. We are not told what

that thorn was, but it may have been weakness in his physical eyesight. Hold your place here in 2 Corinthians and turn to Galatians Chapter 3. In verse 13 Paul says, “You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.” “And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.” “What then was the blessing you enjoyed?” “For I bear you witness that if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.” “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” Now Paul’s weakness appears to have been that he was having great trouble seeing. This crook was given to him by God. And as we turn back to 2 Corinthians 13 we see Paul’s response. It is what ours should be as well. It is to boast in our infirmities, our weaknesses, and our distresses; because when we are weak, then we are strong. How so? Through the power of Christ resting upon us in such a situation. O how I hope that you will see this and receive the truth of it. “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”; that is the good things as well as the things which we see as bad. But the Christian can rejoice in both. Paul says, “I take pleasure in these infirmities”; these crooks.

And so now, 3rdly - we will briefly look at the goal which God has in appointing things for us in this way.

In verse 14 it says, “Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.” The goal that God has in appointing these things for us; these crooks in our lot; is so that we will continually trust in Him for everything that we need; mind, soul, body, and spirit. He will not let us see what tomorrow will bring until He brings it. This is because our tendency is to trust in other things and boast in the things that we think that we presently have; thinking that those things will always be there; that God knows that He must bring these crooks in our lot. Whether it is money and possessions, jobs, our strength or abilities, or even other people; God knows that they are not our real security or source of provision and happiness. They are that which He gives to accomplish His own purpose. His intention in the gospel is that we trust in Christ and be saved. His intention in our living our life is to bring glory to Him and enjoy Him, and so he will hide pride from us. Job Chapter 33. Elihu is speaking to Job about his view of God. Verse 8 – “Surely you have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the sound of your words, saying I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me.” “Yet He finds occasions against me, He counts me as His enemy; He puts my feet in the stocks, He watches all my paths.” “Look in this you are not righteous.” “I will answer you, for God is greater than man.” He goes on to say in verse 16 – “Then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction.” “In order to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man.” That is the purpose of the crook. It is so that man will not think that He knows the outcome of anything in this life or the next, without relating it to God Himself. He conceals pride from man and thus if we boast, we

should boast in the Lord. You can never go wrong boasting in the Lord. Psalm 44: 8 – “In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever.” Let it be so, with each of us, O Lord.