



# **ECCLESIASTES 4:1-6**

**Additional workplace challenges  
(Part 1)**

# DISPLAYS OF EVIL BY OPPRESSORS AND THE PLIGHT OF THE OPPRESSED (4:1-3)

*<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.*

- “*all the oppressions*” – any form of oppression, but particularly those experienced by people trying to make a living
- Wickedness and evil are encountered every day in many forms
- Oppressors have power to defraud and they are willing to use it (“*On the side of their oppressors there was power*”)
  - Leviticus 6:2–5
  - Micah 2:1–2
- Oppression and oppressors are unavoidable realities in our fallen world



# DISPLAYS OF EVIL BY OPPRESSORS AND THE PLIGHT OF THE OPPRESSED (4:1-3)

- *“And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them!”*
  - Oppression brings isolation, great emotion, and frustration – *“no one to comfort them”*
    - Their internal sense of justice is violated, and they cry out for things to be made right
    - There is a deep longing for comfort and justice, but the world offers little consolation
    - The only place true comfort exists is with God and flowing from Him through His people
      - 2 Corinthians 1:3–4
  - Solomon is writing to establish the need for God because of *“the evil deeds that are done under the sun”*



# DISPLAYS OF EVIL BY OPPRESSORS AND THE PLIGHT OF THE OPPRESSED (4:1-3)

*<sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.*

- From a godless point of view, Solomon declares those who are dead are better off

*<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.*

- The agony of godless oppression can be overwhelming
  - Psalm 73:1-17
- The heart of the Lord Jesus is tender toward the oppressed
  - Matthew 9:35–36



# THE REALITY OF ENVY IN THE WORKPLACE (4:4-6)

**Envy produces competition or covetousness (4)** – <sup>4</sup> *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.*

- Covetousness violates the command of God
  - Exodus 20:17
- Lusting for the possessions that belong to another is evil
- If we do not desire to honor God in our toil and skill, we will desire to dominate others
- Cutthroat jealousy shows the rottenness of evil to the core of one's being
  - Proverbs 14:30
- Passion for domination of others is neither godly or fulfilling – it is unsubstantial vapor – “*vanity and striving after the wind*”



# THE REALITY OF ENVY IN THE WORKPLACE (4:4-6)

**Fools gripped by envy become lazy (5) – <sup>5</sup> *The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.***

- Those who don't want to compete by working hard to be productive and quit are fools
  - Fools believe things should come to them easily and assume they come to others easily
  - When they must work hard to stay competitive, they decide to toss in the towel
- “*fool folds his hands*” – indicates his hands are not engaged and productive
- “*eats his own flesh*” – failure to provide ultimately means he wastes away – devours himself
  - 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12
- Working hard is a means of taking responsibility for personal and family provision and protection
  - Don't be a fool and quit
  - Work for the glory of God and the good of others



# THE REALITY OF ENVY IN THE WORKPLACE (4:4-6)

**Envy checked by contentment (6)** – <sup>6</sup> *Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.*

- *“Better is a handful of quietness”* - Solomon is describing productive contentment
  - Seek an adequate amount and live a balanced life
  - Make reasonable investments in your work, in your family, in your church, in your community
    - Matthew 6:19–21
    - 1 Timothy 6:6–8
  - The workaholic builds a name for himself (*two hands full of toil*), but his other responsibilities are neglected and crumble
    - 1 Timothy 6:9–11
- The workaholic is an envious dominator who easily becomes an oppressor
- God, please bless us with balanced lives for your glory and the good of others!



# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- As we prepare to start 2021, what convictions are you experiencing about your work and the need to be balanced?
- In what ways does the word of the Lord and fellowship in the church of the Lord need to help you define a balanced life?
- In recent challenges and oppressive circumstances, how has the Lord been a source of comfort in affliction? (How does He need to be a source of comfort in your affliction?)
- How does God need to help you deal with covetousness in your heart and in your work?
- Are there ways you battling laziness and apathy that call for the Lord's intervention?
- How does the envy of your heart need to be checked by Christ-centered contentment?





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