

Two are better than one

This article on Ecclesiastes 4:9 is edited in part from A Living Commentary by Paul J. Bucknell. Upon close examination of Ecclesiastes 4:9, we should be careful about making a quick interpretation of this verse. The 'if' clauses in Ecclesiastes 4:10-12 show that Solomon is not simply making a statement about having two of something is better than having one. For example: Two hundred dollars is better than one hundred. Two televisions are better than one. Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines, many stables with the best horses, and lots of gold and silver. He is not speaking about possessions or even the number of people he had serving him. He had these, but in the midst of his pursuits, he found that he did not have quality relationships with the few around him. This is what he missed despite his many accomplishments.

The 'two' speaks not just of a couple such as a married couple, but of a relationship between individuals. Two is the minimum number needed for this relationship. Solomon was denouncing the value of getting what he wanted in life with disregard of those around him. He pursued his life rather than God's will. Yes, no doubt, he like many of us would say, that academic degree, that secure life, or that important goal is God's will. I would like to suggest that when it (whatever it is) has raised in us independent spirit from God, then it can no longer be God's will. Yes, it might have been a special burden or vision that God has given to us. Each person has a special God given task, but the question is whether the individual would compromise on God's will to get what they think God wanted. Abraham had a worthy goal of being a great father for God, but his compromise and reliance on his own resources made his sexual intimacy with Hagar displeasing to God. Do people do things in unloving ways to get their task accomplished? Yes, all the time.

The world has tried to take advantage of this concept by developing teams. They see value in it. That is because it is truth taught by the Word of God, "Two are better than one." When anyone utilizes this truth, they will be blessed. Let me ask you what is the difference between a team and a group of people? They might both have two or more people, but they are very different. Solomon is talking about a synergy of spirit that happens when people are living with the same common purpose. The word 'synergy' is made up of two Greek words meaning 'work together.' They are not living in that context for themselves but for the good of the whole.

Of course, just starting a group helps, but in and of itself does not create a good working team. Each individual in the team must be committed to the joint task working with and valuing the contributions of others. Sometimes the pull of success helps people overcome their selfish goals, but the real attitude needed to fuel a team is Christ's Spirit. The divine Godhead is the greatest team. God has brought this team concept, the synergy of spirit, into two particular institutions that are foundational for human civilization: marriage and the church.