

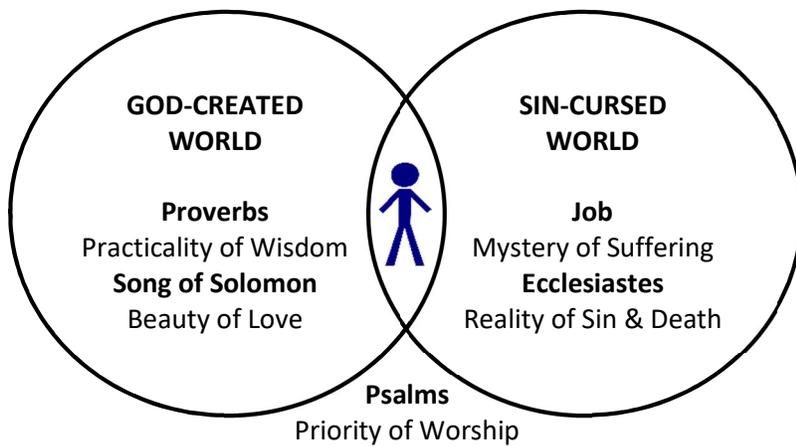


Ecclesiastes 8:1-9:10

LIVING WISELY IN AN UNFAIR WORLD

In general, the sages clearly believed that wise and righteous behavior did make life better and richer, though virtue did not **guarantee** those consequences. ...Proverbs sought first to teach these basic "rules of life." We must first learn the basic rules; the exceptions come later. ...The sages knew that there are limits to human wisdom. General patterns may be discerned, but many particular events may be unjust, irrational, and ultimately inscrutable. The sages' stance is to maintain faith in God's justice, even when they personally cannot see it or touch it, even when the recorded past does not verify it. Here religion provides no escape from the pain or absurdities of existence. The book of Job was inevitable, not because Proverbs was too simplistic, but because life's inequities drive faith to argue with the Deity.

—Raymond C. Van Leeuwen



Beginning in Ecclesiastes 7, the Teacher encourages us to pursue a life of wisdom even though we live in a fallen world that will often be confusing and unfair. Wisdom is *still* better.

TWO UNDENIABLE FACTS IN REALITY 101

1. WE LIVE IN A FALLEN, UNFAIR WORLD (8:9-14; 9:2-6).

Authority _____
(8:9)

Sinners _____
(8:12, 14)

Wicked _____
(8:10)

Righteous _____
(8:14)



Justice _____
(8:11)

All _____ (9:2-6)

Wisdom. Hebrew, *chakmah*, "moral skill, the ability to judge correctly and do the best thing."

The world is unfair. You realize it after a while and spend the rest of your life heaving under the weight of this realization. It's a hard, inassimilable truth that can never be changed; people have tried to change it over ages and across the globe, failing miserably in the end. —Gaurav Singh

Deserving ones don't always get the acclaim. Some people are beautiful but unfortunate, struggling but failing, intelligent but poor, loving but despised. Those who deserve it don't get it but those who get it don't deserve it. Such is life. ...Life is so unfair.

—Vincent Okay Nwachukwu

There is a textual issue in 8:10 that affects interpretation. Some ancient manuscripts have שָׁכַח (*shakach*, "to forget") while some have שָׁבַח (*shavach*, "to praise, boast"). Thus, the idea is either that the wicked man's evil works are forgotten after his death or that the wicked man, who made a mockery of religion while he lived, is actually praised in the city where he lived.

2. WE ARE FALLEN, LIMITED CREATURES (8:7-8, 16-17).

*Since no one knows the future,
who can tell someone else what is to come?
As no one has power over the wind to contain it,
so no one has power over the time of their death.
As no one is discharged in time of war,
so wickedness will not release those who practice it. (Eccl. 8:7-8, NIV)*

When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it. (Eccl. 8:16-17, NKJV)

FOUR WAYS TO LIVE WISELY IN REALITY 101

1. **S** _____ to do the right thing at the right time (8:2-6).
2. **T** _____ God to make things right in the end (8:12-13).
3. **E** _____ life as a good gift from God (8:15).
4. **P** _____ joy in every blessing of God! (9:7-10)

Go, eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, because God has already approved your works. Let your clothes always be white, and do not spare precious ointment on your head. Enjoy life with your beloved wife during all the days of your fleeting life that God has given you on earth during all your fleeting days; for that is your reward in life and in your burdensome work on earth. Whatever you find to do with your hands, do it with all your might, because there is neither work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave, the place where you will eventually go.

This is a powerful image of what Martin Luther calls “the bondage of the will,” in which humans are so caught up in evil that they cannot liberate themselves.

—Craig Bartholomew

*You may consider yourself autonomous, but you are incapable of knowing what should be done, incapable of knowing what wisdom is. You are a creature... All the evils, and I choose my words carefully, **all the evils of the world** stem from our taking ourselves to be the Creator.*

—Jacques Ellul

*The return of Christ will be **the** time for judgment. No longer will evil be called good and good evil; no longer will darkness be turned into light and light into darkness; no longer will bitter be made sweet and sweet bitter. The conflict between good and evil will come to an end, as will all arguments about motives, intentions, and the nature of good. Error will be exposed: real error, turning away from the Lord.*

—G. C. Berkouwer

Man cannot control or predict adversity or prosperity, however, each day’s joys should be received as gifts from God’s hand and be savored as God permits.

—Donald R. Glenn

Joy is the serious business of Heaven.

—C. S. Lewis

Our faith did not arise from the order of the world; the world’s convulsions, therefore, need not destroy it. Rather it rose from the sharpest crisis, the greatest war, the deadliest death, and the deepest grave the world ever knew—in Christ’s cross.

—P. T. Forsyth