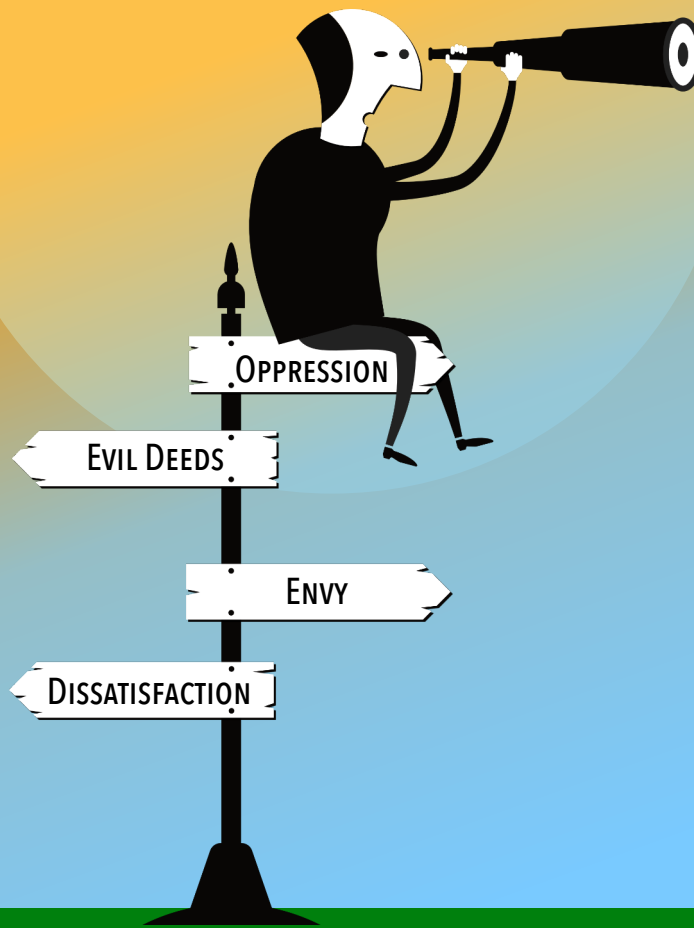


THE OPPRESSIVE REALITY OF LIFE UNDER THE SUN

–THE PREACHER'S PERCEPTION & PERSPECTIVE–

From his lofty perch as king and as the wisest of men, Qoheleth became God's oracle and chronicler on the reality of life under the sun.

AGAIN I LOOKED AND SAW ALL THE OPPRESSION
THAT WAS TAKING PLACE UNDER THE SUN ...



OUTLINE ... (Ecclesiastes 4:1-8 ESV)

1. The Preacher saw and gave commentary on the oppressive reality of life under the sun, 4:1-3.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 ESV) **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.** 2 And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. 3 But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.
- A. He saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun.
 - B. He saw the tears of the oppressed.
 - C. He saw that there was no comforter for the oppressed.
 - D. He deduced that those already dead are better off than those still living.
 - E. He deduced that even better off is the one who has not been born and so has not seen the evil of this world.

2. Old Testament interlude addressing the problem of "no one to comfort them" ...

- A. The LORD whose steadfast love is good and who is abundant in mercy is the Comforter for those who turn to him.
 - (Psalm 69:16-21 ESV) **Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.** 17 Hide not your face from your servant, for I am in distress; make haste to answer me. 18 Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies! 19 You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you. 20 Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. **I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.** 21 They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.
 - (Psalm 86:14-17 NLT) O God, insolent people rise up against me; a violent gang

is trying to kill me. **You mean nothing to them.** 15 But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. 16 **Look down and have mercy on me.** Give your strength to your servant; save me, the son of your servant. 17 Send me a sign of your favor. Then those who hate me will be put to shame, **for you, O LORD, help and comfort me.**

- (Isaiah 51:12-13 NIV) **I, even I, am he who comforts you.** **Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass,** 13 **that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth,** that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor?

B. Those who worship false gods turn away from God's mercy and love.

- (Jonah 2:8 NLT) **Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies.**
- (Jonah 2:8 NIV) **Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.**

C. Israel no longer had the comfort of the LORD because they had turned to idols.

- (Lamentations 1:1-2 ESV) How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. 2 She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers **she has none to comfort her;** all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.
- See also Lamentations 1:8-9, 1:16-17.

3. New Testament interlude addressing the problem of "no one to comfort them" ...

- (John 14:15-16 AMP) If you [really] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands. 16 **And I will ask the Father, and He will give you**

another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, and Standby), that He may remain with you forever—

- (John 14:18 ESV) I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.
- (John 14:26–27 AMP) **But the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, Standby), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name** [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you. 27 **Peace I leave with you;** My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. **Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.** [Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful and intimidated and cowardly and unsettled.]
- (John 16:7 AMP) However, I am telling you nothing but the truth when I say it is profitable (good, expedient, advantageous) for you that I go away. **Because if I do not go away, the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengtheners, Standby) will not come to you** [into close fellowship with you]; but if I go away, I will send Him to you [to be in close fellowship with you].

EXCURSUS: OPPRESSION AND EVIL ARE WHAT WE SHOULD EXPECT TO SEE IN A WORLD IN WHICH HUMANS CHOOSE REASON AND MORAL INDEPENDENCE OVER SUBMITTING TO THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD.

The blessing God blesses us with through the Preacher of Ecclesiastes is that from his unique, lofty perch as king and the wisest of men, and as God's oracle and chronicler, he perceives and then speaks to us the truth of the reality of life under the sun.

The reality of life that he sees is the result of the actions of Adam and Eve thousands of years earlier as they chose reason over revelation and their will over God's will. They decided that they could choose what was good and evil apart from what God had revealed to them.

In disobeying God they separated themselves from God and from God's standard of morality—that which concerns or relates to what is right and wrong in human behavior.

In effect what they chose was not the ability to know good and evil but an enslavement to know and do only evil. **Good ... as God would describe and define it** had become a lost concept to them because thinking they were wise they had become fools.

- (Romans 1:21b–22 ESV) They became **futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.** 22 **Claiming to be wise, they became fools.**

When Adam and Eve reasoned that eating the fruit was good, they lost all ability to know what was good. They switched *categories* from innocence (good) to evil. And evil became the default category for all humans.

The Hebrew word for evil is *ra'* and most basically means bad or wrong. They chose wrong behavior over right behavior when they chose their own way.

The Hebrew word for good is *towb* and most basically means good, to be pleasing, to do well, do good, act right, act rightly.

I. ADAM AND EVE ESTABLISHED THE PRECEDENT OF CHOOSING A HUMAN STANDARD OF BEHAVIOR (EVIL) OVER GOD'S STANDARD OF BEHAVIOR (GOOD).

- (Genesis 2:9b ESV) The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, **and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**
- (Genesis 2:16–17 ESV) And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 **but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,** for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
- (Genesis 3:5 ESV) For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, **and you will be like God,** knowing good and evil.
- (Genesis 6:5 ESV) The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, **and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

II. ADAM AND EVE (AND EVERYONE TO FOLLOW) TURNED TO THEIR OWN WAY WHEN THEY CHOSE HUMAN REASON AND MORAL INDEPENDENCE OVER GOD'S REVELATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- (Isaiah 64:6 NLT) We are all infected and impure with sin. **When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.** Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.
- (Isaiah 53:6 ESV) All we like sheep have gone astray; **we have turned—every one—to his own way;** and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- (Isaiah 66:3b ESV) **These have chosen their own ways,** and their soul delights in their abominations.
- (Proverbs 1:29–31 ESV) Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, 30 would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, 31 **therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.**
- (Matthew 16:24 NLT) Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, **you must give up your own way,** take up your cross, and follow me.

become worthless; **no one does good, not even one.**”

- c. Mere religious people do not know how to do (or be) good.
 - (Jeremiah 4:22 ESV) For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. **They are ‘wise’—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.**
 - (Proverbs 12:15 ESV) **The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,** but a wise man listens to advice.
- d. Only in Christ is it even possible to even know God—the only one who is good and true.
 - (1 John 5:20 ESV) **And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true;** and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

END EXCURSUS

III. A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND UNDERSTANDING OF GOODNESS ...

- a. **DO THE MATH:** There is only one who is good.
 - (Matthew 19:17 ESV) And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? **There is only one who is good.** If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”
- b. **DO THE MATH:** There are no humans who do good, not even one.
 - (Psalm 14:1–3 ESV) The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; **there is none who does good.** 2 The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. 3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; **there is none who does good, not even one.**
 - Cf. Psalm 53:1–3.
 - (Romans 3:10–12 ESV) As it is written: **“None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands;** no one seeks for God. 12 **All have turned aside;** together they have

4. The Preacher saw and gave commentary on the competitive nature and selfish ambition of humans, 4:4-6.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:4–6 ESV) **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. 5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. 6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

5. The Preacher saw and gave commentary on the futility of intense labor for riches which will never satisfy the thirst for meaning, 4:7-8.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:7–8 ESV) **Again, I saw vanity under the sun:** 8 one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, **and his eyes are never satisfied with riches,** so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.