

Additional Notes or Applications

LIVE THE STORY

The Gospel is intended to be learned and lived in community. The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

- Why might it be important for us to recognize what aspects of our lives are in God's hands (out of our control) and in our own hands?
- Can you think of ways humans (us included) are tempted to think that we are in control of what only God can control?
- Why do you think the teaching of God's providence is very comforting for believers?
- The Preacher tells us to eat and drink with joy the gifts of God. Paul may be picking up this idea in 1 Cor. 10:31. What are ways in which our eating or drinking in our prosperity may or may not be to the glory of God?
- Bonhoeffer wrote a letter to his friend on Dec. 18, 1943. Who was born on that same date about two decades later?
- Discuss the Bonhoeffer quotes from that letter. What excesses within the church does he provide a good corrective to?
- Can you think of examples of how (both inside and outside the church) the message of our day often fights against the Preacher's teaching of God's providence?
- Why is it vital to remember that providence doesn't erase province; that despite the things outside our control, that what we do with the things put in our hands is very important and has a lot to do with who we are?

When Life Gets Twisted: Making Sense of the Absurdity of Life *Providence and Province: Who's Hand is It In?*

Jerry Cisar — July 12, 2020

Text: Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

Keyword: Hand

Introduction

I. Providence: Outcomes are in the Hands of God (1-6; 11-12)

- A. The righteous, the wise, and their deeds are in the hands of God.
 - i. "deeds"
 - a) the deeds of the righteous and the wise
 - b) what they accomplished by their deeds
 - ii. This is explained in what follows:
 - a) 1b "Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him."
 - b) 2-3 both good and evil circumstances happen in the lives of the good and the wicked and both their lives end in death.
 - c) 5-6 To say that the living have more hope than the dead isn't saying much.
- B. The Race is Not to the Swift (11-12)

- C. What happens to us in life is not the outcome of how we live but of the Providence of God—the hand of God.

NIV Application Commentary: “We live in a world in which cause and effect are often visibly in connection with each other. I press a light switch, and the light comes on. The swift usually win races. It is this visible connection between cause and effect that makes plausible the idea that somehow the universe can eventually be mastered by human beings, given enough time and sufficiently well-developed technique.”

Economist Robert Schiller: “Overcoming the false sense that each individual’s fate is fully deserved is vital, not only because it inures [numbs] us to our own risks but also because it prevents us from appreciating the kinds of policies that society needs to adopt to deal with these risks and blinds us to the arbitrariness and absurdity of the misfortunes that others face.”

II. Province: Living with What’s in Your Hands (7-10)

- A. What’s in God’s hands; what’s in our hands (1, 10)
B. Enjoy the gifts of God

i. Blessings to be enjoyed but not without obligations.

ii. 1 Corinthians 10:31

- C. Enjoy life with your wife.... (9)

i. The Preacher is not telling us to despise the world.

ii. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing to his friend Eberhard, tells him that for “a person in the arms of his wife” to “long for the hereafter is, to put it mildly, tasteless and in any case is not God’s will.”

iii. “One should find and love God in what God directly gives us... one shouldn’t be more pious than God and allow this happiness to be gnawed away through arrogant thoughts and challenges and wild religious fantasy that is never satisfied with what God gives.”

- D. Whatever it is that God has put in your hand, the gifts He has given you, these are the things which you are to enjoy, to work, to be faithful with, to sacrifice, to share and glorify God with.

- E. Our destiny is in God’s hand; our character is in ours.

Belief Theological Commentary: “In a sane world, ‘wisdom is better than might’ (v. 16), but unfortunately that is not the world in which [the Preacher] lives.”