

Ecclesiastes 5:8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-5/ecclesiastes-58/>

Returning to the ills of injustice, Solomon explains that part of the reason for injustice is bureaucracy.

Solomon revisits the topic of *oppression* that he introduced in Chapter 4. People inherently desire *justice*. God planted *justice* within our hearts. But Solomon tells us not to *be shocked* when we see *the oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness*. Solomon gives the reason why we should not marvel when we see injustice—because *one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them*.

Why would having layers of authority lead to injustice? There are several possibilities. Every layer of authority creates an opportunity for corruption. While in theory each layer ought to provide accountability, often the practicality is those within the governing bureaucracy have more to gain by protecting fellow bureaucrats than they stand to gain by “whistle-blowing.”

Multi-level bureaucracies also tend to favor those with the resources to hire experts to help them navigate the bureaucracy. That means the wealthy get *justice* and the *poor* are out of luck. They get *oppression*. The multi-level bureaucracy also tends to become its own eco-system, with the focus on caring for those within the bureaucracy. Bureaucracies generally only excel at one thing, and that is self-preservation. They are not normally good at benefitting anyone outside the bureaucracy.

The *denial of justice and righteousness* by a multi-layer bureaucracy could be a result of corruption. It could also be due to structural indifference or incompetence. Each person might be responding to the incentives they are given, with the result that the *poor* are oppressed and *justice* is denied.

Biblical Text:

⁸ If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.