

Ecclesiastes 9:1-2

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-9/ecclesiastes-91-2/>

We all share a common destiny—death. All we do in life is in God’s hands.

Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon has been saying he turned his *heart* to consider one thing or another. Here, he says he has *taken all this to his heart*, meaning he has contemplated his discoveries and made a conclusion. The word translated *explain* literally means “declare”; Solomon will now proclaim what his *heart* has discerned. Solomon declares that *the righteous and the wise and what they do (their deeds) are in God’s hands*.

This is an important conclusion. Solomon cannot fully *explain* the breadth of his discoveries through reason and experience. But Solomon can definitively proclaim that all things are *in the hand of God*.

Each person’s destiny is in *the hand of God*. This idea is echoed many places in scripture. For example, [Proverbs 21:1](#) says:

“The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD;
He turns it wherever He wishes.”

God is sovereign over all. And that necessitates (comparative) inadequacy in man. God is God and we are not.

The phrase *Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred or anything awaits him* can be understood as saying that *man does not know* what God’s judgment of his deeds will be after he dies. Paul says something similar in [1 Corinthians 4:4-5](#):

“For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.”

Paul makes it clear that he is not aware of anything in his life that will displease God, but declares that this is not definitive. Paul does not decide

what pleases God. He will find out **from** God, not from himself or other people. This interpretation fits the topic Solomon is about to introduce—the inevitability and universality of death.

Another way the phrase can be interpreted is that *Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred* that he will get in this life. *Anything awaits him* emphasizes that we do not know the future. *Love or hatred* can come from other people no matter what choices we might make. Not only do we not control the future, we also do not control the decisions of others. The reality is that we do not know what tomorrow might bring.

Both interpretations are valid and both are consistent with other passages of scripture. The first interpretation focuses on God's judgment and raises a question: how could God *hate* since God is love? After all, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son to die for it ([John 3:16](#)).

But the Bible instructs us to hate evil ([Amos 5:15](#)). God says He hates divorce ([Malachi 2:16](#)). God hates abominable actions ([Deut 12:31](#)) and idolatry ([Deut 6:22](#)). We know that at the judgment all our deeds will be evaluated with fire, and self-seeking deeds will be burned ([1 Cor 3:11-15](#)). And that God will give an appropriate reward for the deeds of believers, included negative rewards for bad deeds ([2 Cor 5:10-11](#)).

So it is not inconsistent to say that what *awaits* us at the judgment can either be the pleasure of God for good deeds or the displeasure of God for evil deeds. God will still love His children no matter what they do; nothing can separate us from the love of God ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). But who we are is different from what we do. If God's children do evil, God still hates the evil, and will judge it, even though it was done by one of His children. Human parents are no different.

God's displeasure is a part of how our Heavenly Father disciplines His children, in order to conform them to the image of Christ ([Heb 12:6](#); [Romans 8:29](#)).

However, the second interpretation focuses on reactions from others in this life and the consequences of *hate* and sin might have a different application. Sometimes what *awaits* us for standing for what is good is *hate* from other people. And sometimes people who do *evil* are loved for it by others.

And this reality is the same for every human. *It is the same for all*. Not only that, *there is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked*. What is that one

fate? This introduces a topic Solomon will cover in the next several verses: the inevitability of death. It doesn't matter how *righteous* we are, we cannot avoid death. And no matter how *wicked* someone might live, they are still going to die and meet their judgment. Solomon says *there is one fate for the righteous and the wicked*. Every person will see death, then be judged.

This is the thought he carries through the end of the passage with a set of pairs to emphasize his point. No matter if we are *righteous/wicked, good man/sinner, clean/unclean, offer sacrifices/don't offer sacrifices, swear (an oath)/afraid to take an oath*, we are all, in the end, in the same boat in two ways. One, we are in *God's hands*. And second, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" ([Heb 9:27](#)).

What Solomon is *taking to heart* is that we cannot control life. Nor can we avoid death. We cannot figure out the right maneuvers to avoid suffering, confusion, misdeeds of others, or even our ultimate physical demise. We are not in control; we are *in the hand of God*. There are no tricks or knowledge or answers that are going to allow us to gain control. In these respects, we all have the same *fate*. We make the most of it by letting go of our compulsion to understand and control. Choosing instead to live in faith and gratitude, submitting in obedience to the grace and goodness of God.

Biblical Text:

¹ For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him. ² It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.