

Ecclesiastes 8

Wisdom belongs to God

I. Obey Authority

1 Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed.

- **Wisdom:** Light/Peace are evident in a wise person's countenance/demeanor

1 Kings 4:29 ...God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore.

- Young King Solomon sought God-Given wisdom to resolve conflicts in his people
- **Now self-seeking bitter man...**seeking wisdom for self-gain

2 I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. 3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

- **Keep Kings Command:** Keep the Law
 1. Don't be hasty: Don't be personally irreverent to authority
 2. Don't take an evil stand: Don't organize against authority for evil
- **King does what he pleases:** Consequences for disobeying King and his command

4 Where the word of a king is, there is power; And who may say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful...

V2...Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God [obedience to God]

- Power in the command of a king...**Power on loan from God**

**FACT: God appointed every King/President/Prime Minister.
Not an Accident. Not a Coincidence**

Romans 13:1 [Read] Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

- Christians willingly subject themselves to authority because:
 1. **...Every authority is appointed by God.**
 2. ...there is no authority except from God
 3. ...All authorities that exist are appointed by God.
 4. ...Hand-picked by God for that time/place in history

2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.

Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Authority is put in place by God to keep societal order and prevent chaos

- Resisting authority is resisting God*
- Resisting authority results in God's judgment implemented by man
- Doing the right thing brings Peace and Praise from those in authority
- Doing the wrong thing brings Fear and Wrath from those in authority

It is our Heavenly King's command that His children submit to earthly authority.

Mark 12:17 ..."Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." [C.f.1 Peter 2:11-17] Jesus Kingdom is not of this world

***Christians are to resist/rebel against authority
...if/when we are asked to personally violate God's commands**

- E.g. Command to preach the Gospel and make disciples of men

Acts 5:28 "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: **"We ought to obey God rather than men."**

v 5 He who keeps [the kings] command will experience nothing harmful...

5b ...And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment

- Wise men/woman know **how and when** to deal with upcoming difficult situations
 1. Not only in midst of oppressive governments but also...
 2. Interpersonal relationships: Husbands/Wives/Children/Friends
 3. How/when to witness to unsaved

Wise men and woman wait on ...move with... the Holy Spirit...

Isaiah 30:18 ...Blessed are all those who wait for Him...**21** *Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it, "Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left.*

- **Jesus is our Shepherd:** He tells us how and when to move

John 10:27 *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*

6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, Though the misery of man increases greatly. **7** For he does not know what will happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?

- Even when we discern the how/whens...God still allows/uses divine surprises

Sometimes when we think we have all our ducks in a row we are surprised, sucker punched, blindsided. Never saw it coming...

The day we say "I Never thought it would happen to me" is the day we turn to God completely

8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And no one has power in the day of death.

- Exercise/Eat right/Die anyway: Our times are in His hands

8b ...There is no release from that war...

- There is no "discharge" from that war: No one escapes dying...Ratio 1:1

8c ...And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

- Speaks of self-deceit regarding coming judgment: Live like hell?

Highway to Hell/Hell ain't a bad place to be? Too busy living it up to think of dying? Me and death have an understanding. God has some sobering words...

Isaiah 28:18 Your covenant with death will be annulled, And your agreement with Sheol will not stand; When the overflowing scourge passes through, Then you will be trampled down by it.

- Doesn't matter what you think/don't think about judgment...It will happen anyway!

9 All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

- **Power on loan from God will one day re-called from Tyrants**
 1. Voted out
 2. Exiled
 3. Assassinated
 4. Found in a hole [Saddam Hussein]

"**He was caught like a rat,**" said Maj. Gen. Rey Odierno, of the 4th Infantry Division, during a press conference in Tikrit, Hussein's birthplace and roughly 100 miles north of Baghdad. "It was ironic that he was in a hole in the ground across the river from the great palaces he built using all the money he robbed from the Iraqi people." Hussein's apprehension...occurred without a single shot fired. [Loan matured]

Vengeance is Mine says the LORD

SUMMARY Obey Authority: Obey the law of the land. Respect leadership. Rebel if asked to personally go against God's clear command. God will deal with oppressive rulers.

II. Solomon Wrestles with the Question of Equity

10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done.

- **Solomon observes and enters in his journal:**

1. I watched the funeral of a wicked man who died from his wicked deeds
2. I remember he used to go to church Christmas and Easter
3. I watched his friends leave the funeral and continue their wicked ways...not learning any lessons from their friend's death...

It is always our choice to learn from the experiences God allows in our life

Ecclesiastes 7:2 ...Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; **And the living will [should] take it to heart.**

10b...This also is vanity.

**Missing an opportunity to learn an important life lesson...
This also is vanity/chasing wind.**

11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

- Quick/Appropriate sentencing for crime is both a **deterrent to crime and biblical**

Evil thrives in a society that hesitates to punish or disciplines lightly

Genesis 9:6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

Average time served in the US for murder and non-negligent homicide is 71 months which represents 48% of their sentence. Thus the average sentence is a little more than twelve years, but on average, they serve less than half of that. [US Dept. of Justice]

...11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the **heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.**

- **Invitation to do evil/get away with it.**

Bleeding-hearts should be careful of not having bloody hands [NJC]

12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

- Inequity observed by man under the sun does not in turn mean that God is unfair
- Justice may not happen in this lifetime...**but it will happen**

Psalms 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked...**16** When I thought how to understand this, It

was too painful for me— 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. [Heaven/Hell are realities]

- Solomon continues to wrestle with the issue of justice...

14 There is a vanity which occurs **on earth**, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

- **Inequity? God is not fair? Things are upside down? "On earth"**
 1. Why do bad things happen to good people
 2. Why do good things happen to bad people
- **Solomon under the Sun:** Skewed perspective
 1. Will not get his focus off the horizontal and raise his head to the God
 2. Will not recognize curse of Genesis 3...You will surely die! Separated from God
 3. Refuses to recognize his own innate sinfulness and that of every man

Romans 8:10 ..."There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

Romans 8:23 ...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.

We are not sinners because we sin...we sin because we are sinners

More Legitimate Question: Why do good things happen to any of us?

Psalm 8:3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, 4 What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?

- **Solomon:** What I observe is all upside down!
- Instead of going to God, confessing his own sin, or praying for others
- Solomon goes to his default

15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

- Nothing drives a wise man crazier than not being able to "figure it out"
- **Solomon's default:** Pleasure [Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 "It's Vanity"]

Sometimes we need to stop drowning out God's voice even when it hurts
Sometimes Sober contemplation about our sinful state is God's will

Isaiah 22:12 [Prophecy against Judah and Jerusalem]...in that day the Lord God of hosts Called for weeping and for mourning, For baldness and for girding with sackcloth.13 But instead, [He sees] joy and gladness, Slaughtering oxen and killing sheep, Eating meat and

drinking wine: **"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"** 14... "Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, Even to your death," says the Lord God of hosts.

- God wanted nation Israel to mourn over their sinful state and turn to Him
 1. 911? Did we as nation turn to God or to prideful arrogance? We will rebuild?
- Individuals: Times when sober contemplation is God's will...leading to restoration

Ecclesiastes 8:4b And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment

Ecclesiastes 3:4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance...

SUMMARY: Solomon Wrestles with the Question of Equity: Why inequity on Earth? Because of you Solomon.

III. Complexity of the Work God

16 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, 17 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.

- **Still no answers**

Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; But it was far from me. 24 As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, **Who can find it out?**

The Bible reveals what we **need to know** about Life and Godliness [2 Peter 1:3-4]
...but **not everything about God**

We look at life from the back side of the tapestry. And most of the time, what we see is loose threads, tangled knots and the like. But occasionally, God's light shines through the tapestry, and we get a glimpse of the larger design with God weaving together the darks and lights of existence. [J. Piper]

SUMMARY Complexity of the Word of God: We will keep looking and discovering...