

The Stillness of God – Ecclesiastes 8

Main Idea: Trust in God even when you don't have all the answers

I. Human Insight | Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

Solomon opens chapter 8 with two rhetorical questions and a proverb that resonate his lifelong search: “Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed” (v.1). In verses 2-4, Solomon emphasizes submission to God by means of practical illustration: “Keep the king’s command, because of God’s oath to him.” **Those who cannot submit to earthly authorities will not submit to God.** Nonetheless, this is not blind allegiance but an acknowledgment that God’s order, however reflected in earthly rule, flows from His sovereign hand (Rom. 13:1). **The wise person obeys out of fear of God, not fear of man. Similarly, wisdom is only godly and useful when accompanied by a proper fear of God.** Obedience, then, becomes an act of trust—a recognition that God governs through means He Himself establishes. As a result, “the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. For there is a time and a way for everything, although man’s trouble lies heavy on him” (v.6). An unwise heart, on the other hand, often reacts in accordance with the world, showing proud demeanor that comes from the blinding effects of sin. **An unwise heart does the opposite of what Scripture instructs by loving what Jesus condemns, opposing what Jesus loves, and doing what Jesus would never have done—showing us that outside of God’s work, man might be able to increase his intellect but not his wisdom.** Jesus defines wisdom not as intellectual brilliance but as obedience born of the fear of the Lord (Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49). Biblically, true wisdom is relational rather than intellectual—seeking not autonomy but dependence on God.

Solomon is painfully aware that this obedience is not without tension. **Human insight can discern the rightness of obedience, but it cannot predict its outcome.** The wise may act justly and still suffer unjustly. Verse 8 reminds us of this humbling boundary: “No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death.” Wisdom cannot control life; obedience cannot escape mortality. Wisdom, then, is not found in mastering outcomes but in maintaining the fear of the Lord. The wise do not demand that God explain Himself; they trust that His commands are good even when His purposes are concealed. **Solomon’s counsel to “keep the king’s command” (v.2) ultimately points beyond earthly rulers to the heavenly King whose word governs all creation.** Obedience, in this sense, becomes an act of worship—submitting not because we see all things clearly, but because we know the One who does. A wise heart waits for the proper time and the just way (v.6), discerning that every moment unfolds within the boundary of divine sovereignty. **Faithful hearts still ache under delay and injustice. The difference lies in posture: the unwise rebel under the burden, while the wise bow beneath it, trusting that God’s stillness is not abandonment but providence.** The silence of heaven is never empty; it hums with purpose. This is the stillness Christ embodied—the calm of perfect obedience amid human chaos. Before governors and soldiers, before false accusations and unjust authority, He remained faithful (Matt. 27:12-14), not because He was powerless, but because He was perfectly surrendered to the Father’s will. His stillness was strength; His submission was victory. To follow Him is to learn that **divine wisdom is not measured by how much we know, but by how deeply we trust.** In a restless world that equates noise with control, the wise heart finds peace in the quiet sovereignty of God.

To Ponder:

1. What does it look like, in my daily choices, to love what Jesus loves and resist what He condemns?
2. How can I cultivate a wise heart that listens more than reacts and obeys more than argues?
3. When God seems still or silent, what truths about His character anchor me in obedience?

II. Human Inability | Ecclesiastes 8:10-17

From the realm of wisdom, Solomon turns to the realm of man's inability to live for the glory of God on his own. Here, we see an ugly yet realistic glimpse into the total depravity of the human heart, "Then I saw the wicked buried," he writes, "who used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things" (v.10). **Under the sin, the righteous often perish (earthly) unacknowledged, and the wicked are honored—an inversion that exposes the unavoidable and destructive reality of sin.** Solomon's conclusion is sobering: "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil" (v.11). **Under the sun, divine stillness is often mistaken for divine neglect.** Yet Solomon affirms—God's justice is not absent; it is patient (Ex. 34:6; Rom. 2:4). The wicked may prolong their days "like a shadow," but only for a moment (v.13). **Time is not mercy's abdication but its stage.** Every delay of God (in man's sight) only serves to magnify His grace in light of His eminent and upcoming judgment. The cross stands as the supreme revelation of this truth. **No moment in history appeared more unjust, more silent, or more still—yet it was there that God accomplished His most decisive act.** What looked like inactivity was omnipotence hidden in suffering. The resurrection vindicated what wisdom could not foresee. In Christ, divine stillness is not absence but the slow pulse of redemption.

Solomon's closing words in this chapter remind us that the mystery of God's ways is not meant to frustrate faith but to refine it. Solomon's weary confession—"man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun"—becomes a gracious boundary line, calling us to humility before the throne of providence. Where sight fails, faith takes root. **The wise heart accepts that some purposes of God remain hidden, not because He is absent, but because He is infinitely greater than we can conceive.** As Calvin wrote, "Where God closes His holy mouth, I will desist from inquiry."¹ This surrender is not intellectual laziness but spiritual maturity—the quiet confidence that the Judge of all shall always do right (Gen. 18:25). **In a world obsessed with explanations, the Gospel invites us into adoration. The believer's peace does not depend on having all the answers but on knowing the Answer Himself.** Christ is the wisdom of God made flesh (1 Cor. 1:24), revealing in His person what human reason could never attain. He does not merely teach us how to live wisely; He becomes our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30). Through Him, divine stillness is not threatening but comforting—the silence of a sovereign Father whose plan is sure, even when unseen. **To live wisely is not to master mystery but to worship within it, trusting that every unanswered question bends toward redemption.** This is the posture of those who wait well: not passive idleness, but active faith. The wise rest in the stillness of God, assured that His delays are never denials and His silence never void. What seems motionless in time is vibrant with eternal purpose. Ecclesiastes 8 teaches us that life "under the sun" will often seem unjust, unpredictable, and unresolved. Yet above the sun reigns a faithful God who is neither hurried nor hindered. The final word belongs not to confusion but to Christ, whose resurrection transforms the stillness of death into the song of life. Thus, the wise heart learns to be still—not because it understands everything, but because it trusts the One who does.

To Ponder:

1. How does recognizing my inability to understand God's timing draw me closer to His grace rather than drive me toward doubt?
2. How do I respond when I face circumstances I cannot control or explain? How can my response reflect the wisdom described by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 8?

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1.13.21.