**Ecclesiastes**

**Chapter 8**

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**Ecc 8:1-2**

*Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam. (2) I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.*

This may be a reference to Adam, the first man who was created good and wise although he did not obey God’s command. Since Adam was the wisest of men there are none others like him. There certainly are very few wise men in the world who have perfected the application of wisdom. Since Solomon’s applications have been related to God, he probably means that there are none who can interpret properly what God is doing in nature or providence. We have the example of Moses whose face showed that he was filled with the presence and knowledge of God:

Exo 34:29-30 *It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. (30) So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.*

We also know that Stephen was filled with wisdom and the Spirit: Act 6:10 *But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.* Such wisdom from God makes a person look amiable and lovely in the sight of others and he knows the difference between truth and falsehood. Such wisdom changes a person from an austerity of countenance and inhumanity into a person who is meek, gentle and humane. James and Paul state such a change perfectly:

* Jas 3:17 *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.*
* 2Co 3:18 *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*
* 1Cor 1:24 *but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Solomon says that wisdom will also cause a person to keep the command of the king because of any oath in the taking of an office requiring such an oath. We are however to not obey anyone if such a command is contrary to the will of God: Act 4:19 *But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;*

Ecc 8:3-6

*"Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases." (4) Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?" (5) He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure. (6) For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man's trouble is heavy upon him.*

If we interpret this to be referring to an earthly king then an interpretation of verse 3 means we should not go out of the presence of the king in a passionate manner relating to an aversion of the statement of the king. If Solomon means to not hurriedly leave God then he means that there is no way to flee from His presence:

Psa 139:7-10 *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (8) If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. (9) If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, (10) Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me.*

Solomon tells us to not walk in the way of evil but to repent of doing any evil thing and not repeat it whether he means an earthly king of the King. Certainly doing whatever He pleases relates to God in that He can do whatever He pleases in heaven or the earth: Job 23:13 *"But He is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does.* Continuing with application to the King, nobody can ask God what He is doing for His authority extends to all venues and there is nobody with the wisdom to ask God such a question: Job 9:12 *"Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?'* Keeping the royal command brings peace and no condemnation whether this refers to a king or the King. Such a person will enjoy the protection of the government and the praise of people:

* Rom 13:3-4 *For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; (4) for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.*
* John 14:21 *"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."*

The wise man knows his duty to God and men and he knows the best time to perform such duties: Gal 6:10 *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.* There also is a proper season and a proper manner for doing everything and a wise man will discern when to do such a thing. If a person does not observe the proper time and manner of doing what he should, then he will bring much trouble upon himself as the evil of misery comes upon him.

**Ecc 8:7-11**

*If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen? (8) No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it. (9) All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt. (10) So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility. (11) Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.*

Nobody can tell the future as the actions of the future are only known by God. If this continues the previous discussion then perhaps it means that nobody can determine when he will be judged for not obeying the commands of God. No person can control the wind or have any control over the time of his death: Job 14:5 *"Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.* Death puts down anyone’s power and authority as illustrated by David being called King David except when he died when he is called David: 1Ki 2:1-2 *As David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, (2) "I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man.* Everyone is involved in warfare with death which is the last enemy to be destroyed. Those who practice evil cannot deliver someone from death. Solomon says that he has seen all of the above events and he has set his mind to understand all the works of man. He has even seen events where a ruler has authority over someone and exercises that authority to hurt the person. There is no escaping death. Wicked people die and are buried when they actually did not deserve a burial. Some of these wicked people even served in assignments of power and authority where they served as God’s vice-regents. As time passes their actions are forgotten as if they had never been done. They may have had pompous funerals but all their actions are futile as they come to the same end as all others.

Verse eleven is particularly important in our time. When people sit on death row for 20 or so years for a horrendous crime it certainly encourages evil people to continue in their evil actions as they think the odds are slim that they will be caught and, if caught, they will not have to pay the ultimate penalty for the crime.

**Ecc 8:12-14**

*Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. (13) But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God. (14) There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.*

A sinner is someone who sins without repentance and it is possible that such a person sins many times throughout his life. God many even prolong his life and the execution of the sentence against his evil works. But the Preacher knows that the final judgment for those who fear God and practice such a fear openly will not be what his sins deserve. However the evil person will not have such a blessed time for at death he will be given a judgment and hear an awful sentence such as “Go, you cursed” and they will be in torment forever.

* Isa 3:10 *Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, For they will eat the fruit of their actions.*
* Isa 3:11 *Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him, For what he deserves will be done to him.*

The life of the wicked person is like a shadow that declines and is quickly gone since the fear of God is not always before him or in his heart. He has observed a futility in life in that there are righteous people whose lives are marred by the actions of wicked people. He has also observed that some evil people have their lives blessed by the actions of the righteous people. If anyone expects to see fair treatments of everyone living on the earth, he will be greatly disappointed in such a futile expectation.

**Ecc 8:15-17**

*So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun. (16) When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), (17) and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.*

Thus it is futile to fret over the prosperity of the wicked and the perils of the righteous. He is not teaching a hedonistic approach to life but just that we must come to terms with our inability to explain injustice in the world. He does recommend that people enjoy the things of the world in moderation and without sinning. Paul understood this as we read in the following:

* 2Co 12:10 *Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*
* Php 4:11 *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*
* 1Tim 6:8 *If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.*

Solomon turned his attention to know wisdom regarding God in His providence and to understand the business of Providence as appearing to deal unequally with the righteous and the wicked. This search for meaning led him to sleep very little at day or night. After looking at all the works of God he concluded that it is impossible to understand the meaning behind all those works. All these actions point to the sovereignty of God and to the wisdom that no person can understand the providence of God. It is best to submit to the authority of God and to understand that although someone can see actions in the world he can never discover the meaning of all of them. While a long life honoring God is seen in Scripture as a blessing, length of life is not dependent on righteousness. We all know that many of God’s people have rather short lives while evil people may live into an advanced age.