

## Ecclesiastes 8 The Injustice of It All

We're well into Ecclesiastes. So, let's do a quick review.

The "Preacher/ Teacher" is giving a perspective about life "under the sun" and he says that it is "hevel" – i.e. smoke, mist, an enigma, transitory, vanity.

That is true for the believer and the non-believer.

Life goes off script.

God did not decree a world that would always be perfect for us, but don't let it separate you from God. Trust Him, live in the "fear of God".

Realize that we can't critique God because we are sinful.

Now, how do we live and navigate this world

So how do we cope?

Well, some go after pleasure, wealth, sex, entertainment.

Some get into philosophy. Some get into work. All of those are ways to fill the void or try to bring some stability and coherence to life, or at least some personal satisfaction.

**The wisest thing you can do is to realize that not even being wise will tell you everything you want to know. - David Gibson**

**Wisdom comes by living in the "fear of God" and acknowledging the "hevel", and the God who is in control in the midst of it.** God has ordained a time for all things – chap 3. The "preacher" has located our true meaning in the providence of God and in our acknowledgement of the providence of God. He's going to come back to that again in Ecclesiastes 8, and he's going to mention our embracing the reality of God's providence as a key to living wisely in this life, to being wise in this life, and to experience meaning in this life.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+8&version=TLB>

The LIVING BIBLE – Chap 8:2-17

**PURSUE WISDOM, FEAR God, AND ENJOY WHAT HE HAS GIVEN YOU TODAY.**

Ecclesiastes shows us that we should do what is right even when everything is going wrong.

EX: Bobby Jones – golfer – hit ball in woods and accidently touched the ball. No one knew, but he called a shot on himself and lost by that stroke. WHEN his caddie ASKED, "Why?" he responded, "I knew".

That is integrity- more important than winning a tournament

There are four key ideas in Solomon's teaching in 8:2–17.

**Solomon gives a general admonition to wise, godly submission (8:2–7).**

**<sup>2-3</sup> Obey the king as you have vowed to do. Don't always be trying to get out of doing your duty, even when it's unpleasant. For the king punishes those who disobey. <sup>4</sup>The king's command is backed by great power, and no one can withstand it or question it. <sup>5</sup>Those who obey him will not be punished. The wise man will find a time and a way to do what he says. <sup>6-7</sup>Yes, there is a time and a way for everything, though man's trouble lies heavy upon him; for how can he avoid what he doesn't know is going to happen?**

v. 2

There are some differing translations and views:

- "obey the mouth of the king"
- "protect or restrain the king from making a foolish decision"

Either way, there is a Godward focus- "because of the oath to God.

It is certainly true that a new king brings a pledge to obey. That is the way things were done. One of the hardest teachings, for those on the left or the right, is here in this text, and elsewhere, notably 1 Peter, where we are called to give submission to those in authority over us, even when we disagree, think they are wrong or are wicked. There is a call to recognize that God has established the king, or those who rule. We live in a system where our voices and votes can be heard. Not so for those in the days of Ecclesiastes.

We are NOT CALLED to obey wicked commands, but we should acknowledge that our integrity may have consequences.

So many real-life situations bring us face to face with the issue of integrity every day.

The heart is fragile, and we'd like to think that "we'd do the right thing under pressure", but don't think more highly of yourself than you ought – TRUE FOR ME AS WELL.

Darren Brown's THE PUSH – a chilling experiment in social compliance / peer pressure.

v. 3 people tend to leave bad kings, but beware. Don't violate the oath in bad times. Be true to your vows in life. You don't have to follow people into evil, but neither should we abandon vows because the person is a sinner.

Sinful people are the only ones to whom we can make a vow.

V5 -7 Wisdom helps us discern between a legitimate command and one that violates the will of God.

v. 6 -7 when troubles are heavy, know that God will one day turn it around. Don't violate what is right in those times –

Though troubles may be heavy, A wise man will find the right time and right way to do what he needs to do. We may feel oppressed or perplexed by our ignorance of the future, but we can't avoid that.

Be patient. Don't hold a clock on God. "God invented time, men invented watches" – Swindoll

Solomon gives a reminder of the limitations and evil of human governors (8:8-11).

**8 No one can hold back his spirit from departing; no one has the power to prevent his day of death, for there is no discharge from that obligation and that dark battle. Certainly, a man's wickedness is not going to help him then.**

**9-10 I have thought deeply about all that goes on here in the world, where people have the power of injuring each other. I have seen wicked men buried, and as their friends returned from the cemetery, having forgotten all the dead man's evil deeds, these men were praised in the very city where they had committed their many crimes! How odd! 11 Because God does not punish sinners instantly, people feel it is safe to do wrong**

v. 8-9 the evil will ultimately fall; keep doing right. Again we see the reminder that death comes for all, even the powerful.

In this life we know that evil exists, and that people do evil to one another. We can't change hearts through laws and we can't simply spoon feed obedience to our kids or to each other. We can pray for change, but we can't make it happen.

King Canute ruled in England from 1016–1035, arriving there as a pagan but dying as a Christian king of Denmark, Norway, and England. At one point he erected his throne before the rising tide to demonstrate that as a human king he could not hold back the ocean's waves. Thus he dramatically taught his subjects that although he had his authority from God, he was not god himself. Then the king leapt backwards, saying: 'Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws.'" He then hung his gold crown on a [crucifix](#), and never wore it again "to the honour of God the almighty King".<sup>[2]</sup>

**We are to walk humbly with God and recognize our limitations** – (Magnum Force- Clint Eastwood)

v. 10-11 Thinking that God would not act, the wicked flaunted God and died a normal death with a burial.

Don't assume that God is not in control because he is not acting as we want. Knee-jerk reactions are not common with God. He is not a genie in a bottle with instant action. He works through the slow processes of life.

- we want God to strike someone down immediately when they curse him but that is not the norm.  
-often God works through the process of natural consequences.

*If judicial sentence is delayed or even derailed that does not mean that people get off scot-free. This is why it is so important for a society to have a kind of corporate Christian conscience. Without a conviction of God's judgment on the last day, there are no restraints on wickedness other than the civil punishments inflicted by the civil authorities. Jeff Meyers*

As much as people may rebel against the idea of a God who judges, people want someone to be a righteous judge.

In speaking to the European Parliament on April 17<sup>th</sup> French President Emmanuel Macron spoke about how "we need a sovereignty stronger than our own". That language is political and, in a sense, theological. Where would that sovereignty come from if we only have a secular worldview of life without God? i.e. "under the sun".

Those who don't believe in God still want some sort of "justice" or "fairness" If we are just a random collection of atoms that got here by chance, then how can we even talk of "justice"?

If we all just emerged out of the primordial slime and some became Shakespeare, Mother Theresa, and Hitler, the how can we even speak of justice or injustice?

Ecclesiastes shows us how men oppress one another and can't restraint themselves.

<https://albertmohler.com/2018/04/18/briefing-4-18-18/>

Chap 8 reminds us to obey God because He is just and true, not because of perks that come right now.

Ecclesiastes goes against Made in America Christianity where we hear, "Follow these principles or steps and you'll have the life you want and your best life now."

**There is an exhortation to fear God and exercise faith in the Lord's final judgment (8:12–14).**

**. 12 But though a man sins a hundred times and still lives, I know very well that those who fear God will be better off, 13 unlike the wicked, who will not live long, good lives—their days shall pass away as quickly as shadows because they don't fear God.**

**14 There is a strange thing happening here upon the earth: Providence seems to treat some good men as though they were wicked, and some wicked men as though they were good. This is all very vexing and troublesome!**

v. 13 it will come around  
v. 14- level of life – unpredictable  
- you can do right and bad things can still happen.  
Even the evil men seem to prosper. Why?? Do we serve God in vain? – Ps 73

ESV notes...

*the wicked—who do not fear God—apparently do not get punished for their sins but instead live long lives (8:12) and receive the treatment due to the righteous, such as an honorable burial (v. 11). While God undoubtedly has a reason for allowing this to happen, he has not revealed it to mankind; hence it is an inexplicable vanity(v. 10).*

*One ought not to conclude from this, however, that it makes no difference whether or not one fears God: the Preacher insists that it will be well with those who fear God and that it will not be well with the wicked. The Preacher trusts divine revelation to be more reliable than his own empirical observation and knows that, ultimately, justice will be done.*

Prov 3 – “fear God and don’t be wise in your own eyes.”

When we see all the stuff that comes along in the headlines, it is easy to become paralyzed in fear or in conspiracy theories – from the left or the right. Activist on the left and the right will exploit our fears for their fundraising. We forget that God is still in control, and though the wicked seem to be winning in certain areas, they are still under the hand of God.

(this is not a call to apathy, but a call to remember that God is still on the throne of the universe.)

The Psalmists know the feeling and they voice the cries of those desperate for God to intervene.

Ex Psalm 109

Finally, Solomon concludes by repeating the encouragement to receive God’s good gifts now without trying to figure everything out. 15-17

**15** Then I decided to spend my time having fun because I felt that there was nothing better in all the earth than that a man should eat, drink, and be merry, with the hope that this happiness would stick with him in all the hard work that God gives to mankind everywhere.

**16-17** In my search for wisdom I observed all that was going on everywhere across the earth— ceaseless activity, day and night. (Of course, only God can see everything, and even the wisest man who says he knows everything, doesn’t!)

God is doing one work from beginning to end and we can’t really figure it out.

3:13-14; 3:12 5:19 8:15 “eat, drink, be merry, rejoice in your labor, enjoy God’s good gifts”

“fear God” 3:14; 5:7; 7:18 8:12; 8:12; 8:2; 12:5; 12:13

Winston Churchill was speaking of Russia, not God, when he made his now-famous quip, but it’s perfectly suited to describe what we have been learning here in Ecclesiastes: “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”

V 15 – do the right thing and enjoy life now.

<http://tothesource.org/cultural-engagement/bobby-jones-stroke-of-genius-2/>

Bobby Jones – got degenerative back disorder at height of career and slowly fell apart. When asked, “How can you cope?” he responded “You play the ball where it lies...I knew wealth and fame, and I like all men have something that will kill me.”

We can avoid some pain by avoiding doing stupid, but there are no guarantees against difficulty. Jesus told us that – “in the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world.”

Be steadfast in the good things you can control:

Be a good husband or wife, parent, child, boss, employer, student, teacher. Practice honesty and wise decision making, stewardship; beware of greed; flee youthful lusts, etc. stay out of jail.

1 Thess 4:11-12

Jesus didn't come to give us our best life now. He came to give us His life now and in eternity. One aspect of having His life is having a supernatural trust in God even when things don't make sense to us.

V 17 We can't know everything

A mark of biblical faith is being content without knowing everything, i.e. living in the trust and fear of God.

William Cowper's hymn, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.”

Cowper was a very troubled man. Psychologically, God had given him an enormous cross to carry all through his life. He wrote some marvelous hymns and this is one of them.

**“God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.  
Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.”**

John Piper tells of an occasion when he met and spoke to Joni Eareckson Tada. Joni lifted up her hands as high as she could in the braces that she has to wear as a quadriplegic, and this is what she said with a loud voice.

*“This is the prison where God has set me free; not free from pain, not free from limitation, not free from the frustration of it all, but the freedom to live—the freedom of life. That life is more than legs and skiing and jogging. It's about forgiveness; and it's about hope; and it's about love; and it's about meaning; and it's about eternal life; and it's about a relationship with Jesus. It's about knowing God and knowing that God will never, ever leave you or forsake you.”*

That is Christ centered Wisdom.

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