

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes: Ecclesiastes 8

"The Wicked & The Righteous"

5/15/13

SUMMARY

Among the "vanities" in life is living in circumstances over which we have little control. Such as the kind of government ruling the country in which we live. Solomon observed that evil men are often in positions of power, and offers his counsel for enduring such "vanity."

Wisdom is helpful, capable of softening one's countenance (so one is not overly troubled?). Submitting to governing authorities is important, especially in view of the power wielded by those in authority. There will be times when the wicked rule, bringing misery. Be patient, while judgment against such evil may be delayed it will come in its own time and the wicked will soon be forgotten after their demise. In the meantime, it is best to fear God (1-13).

Another "vanity" is how the righteous sometimes suffer while the wicked prosper. Solomon reiterates his conclusion that it is best to seek to enjoy what good God gives in one's labor under the sun. Even the wisest man is unable to discern all that God is doing, no matter how hard he tries. A lesson similar to the one taught in the book of Job (14-17).

A. SUBMIT TO AUTHORITIES (1-8)

Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things? A person's wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance. ² Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. ³ Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. ⁴ Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?" ⁵ Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. ⁶ For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery. ⁷ Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? ⁸ As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

1. Wisdom has its value, able to change one's countenance
2. Obey the king's command, for God's sake
 - a. Don't be hasty to leave the king's presence
 - b. Don't take your stand for an evil thing
 - c. Respect his power, and you will be unharmed
3. A wise man will understand that judgment will come in its own time, so don't resort to wickedness (i.e., rebellion) to alleviate misery - cf. Ro 13:1-7; 1Pe 2:11-17

ECCLESIASTES 8:1

Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective and then to know the best course of action to take. Most people would agree that wisdom is a valuable asset, but how can we acquire it? Proverbs

9:10 teaches that the fear of the Lord (respect and honor) is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom comes from knowing and trusting God; it is not merely the way to find God. Knowing God will lead to understanding and then to sharing this knowledge with others.

B. ANTICIPATE WICKED RULERS (9-13)

⁹ All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. ¹⁰ Then too, I saw the wicked buried—those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise^[e] in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless. ¹¹ When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. ¹² Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. ¹³ Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

1. There will be times when men rule to their own detriment
2. They will soon be forgotten after their demise
3. Why do some persist in their evil?
 - a. Because their judgment does not occur immediately
 - b. Even so, it is still better to fear God

ECCLESIASTES 8:10

This verse probably refers to how we quickly forget the evil done by some people after they have died. Returning from the cemetery, we praise them in the very city where they did their evil deeds.

ECCLESIASTES 8:11

If God doesn't punish us immediately for sin, we must not assume that he doesn't care or that sin has no consequences. When a young child does something wrong and is not punished, it is much easier for the child to repeat the act. Remember, God knows every wrong we commit, and one day we will have to answer for all that we have done (12:14).

C. EXPECT PERPLEXITY (14, 16-17)

¹⁴ There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. ¹⁵ So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun. ¹⁶ When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night— ¹⁷ then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

1. Sometimes the righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper, which is vanity
2. One cannot always understand why things happen the way they do (remember Job?)

D. ENJOY LIFE (15)

1. Delight in the fruits of your own labor
 - a. Eat, drink, and be merry
 - b. As you labor in the days God has given you in life under the sun
2. The advice given throughout this book - **2:24-26; 3:12-13; 5:18-20**

ECCLESIASTES 8:15

Solomon recommends the remedy for life's unanswered questions: joy and contentment. We must accept each day with its measure of work, food, and pleasure. Let us learn to enjoy what God has given to refresh and strengthen us so we may continue his work.

ECCLESIASTES 8:16, 17

Even if he had access to all the world's wisdom, the wisest man would know very little. No one can fully comprehend God and all that he has done, and there are always more questions than answers. But the unknown should not cast a shadow over our joy, faith, or work because we know that someone greater is in control and that we can put our trust in him. Don't let what you don't know about the future destroy the joy God wants to give you today.