

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 8

The Value and Limits of Wisdom

Human wisdom is valuable, but it has its limitations.

[Slide 2] Wisdom as a multi tool.

[Slide 3] Things to try to perform with a multi-tool:

- Comb your hair
- Hammer a nail
- Tie your shoe
- Play a song
- Cut a heart out of paper
- Hold a pencil and write with it
- Make a sleeveless T-shirt
- Pick a pin up off the floor
- Unscrew a screw
- Make a phone call
- Crack open a pecan
- Tell what time it is.

Multi tool is useful, but it can't do everything.

We will see in 8 that it starts by extolling the value of wisdom, and ends with an acknowledgement of its limitations.

[Slide 4] Read Ecc 8:1-5 (p557)

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.

2 I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. 3 Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. 4 For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

Discuss: Are you a rule-follower or a rule-breaker?

Turn signals, speed limits, exit doors at Walmart, etc.

Some rules more important than others; some people bristle at having to follow rules at all.

A wise person will know to obey the king (ruler), and also will generally know the best course of action as well as how to behave.

8:5 The wise person will find the proper time for each action (as we looked at in Chapter 3)

[Slide 5] Paul gives us a similar instruction in Romans 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. (p 948)

[Slide 6] Read Ecc 8:6-9

6 For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. 7 For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? 8 No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. 9 All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done **under the sun**, when man had power over man to his hurt.

8:6 Doing the necessary above and before addressing our own concerns.

8:7, Consider James 4:13-16 [Slide 7] (p1013)

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills,

we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Our knowledge of the future is lacking.

Human wisdom comes up short in helping us understand why God deals with people as He does.

[Slide 8] As we saw:

1:18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

7:13-14 Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

[Slide 9] Read Ecc 8:10-13

10 Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that **it will be well** with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

Sometimes, ppl do evil things and get away with it – as a result it encourages them to keep doing evil things.

Also, because justice is not always apparent and often delayed, the unwise follow the path of evil.

Verses 12 & 13 show how God is in control and will take care of the righteous and punish the wicked.

His statement, “I know” shows a contrast to all the things he says he doesn’t understand.

[Slide 10] Read Ecc 8:14

There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

Then we see 14 which is injustice – and it is called vanity. The incomprehensible “Hebel” of life. (The rain falls on the just and the unjust.)

Job is a good example of this.

While we’re here: Retribution Theology / Deuteronomic Theology

Called so because it is described in some passages of Deut.: cf 11:26-28 and 30:11-20

[Slide 11] Read Dt. 11:26-28 (p156)

26 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.

The thought in short is when we do good, God blesses us and when we do bad, He punishes us.

Discuss: Is this a biblical idea we should believe?

Think of the context – God speaking to the Israelites as they are about to enter the Promised Land, God is telling them what they need to do if they expect him to support them in this task.

It is generally true, but it’s a problem if we make this an absolute rule.

- Job’s friends tried to get Job to confess sin he hadn’t committed.
- John 9, man born blind: who sinned for this man to be born blind? Him or his parents? Jesus says, “Neither.”

Consider the blind man – born that way so God can use him for this specific moment later.

We don't try to manipulate God into blessing us. As Christians, we love God, and we obey Him because we love him, come what may.

[Slide 12] Read Ecc 8:15

And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

By now, familiar advice. Eat and drink and be joyful. This is his fourth time making this statement. (2:24, 3:12-15, 5:18-20)

It stems from the Teacher's somber reflections about life: in the end, we can neither predict nor control prosperity or adversity.

We should submit to God, realizing He is in control, and enjoy those things with which he has blessed us.

[Slide 13] Read Ecc 8:16-17

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

The Teacher is obviously a wise man, and he recognizes the limitation.

In our limited wisdom, we simply cannot understand why certain things happen, or exactly how God is governing the world.

True wisdom includes the humility to admit that we cannot fully understand the work of God on this earth.

[Slide 14] Dt. 29:29 says, (p 171)

29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Example: the seven thunders of Rev. 10

The teacher's quest continues in the next chapter...