

Eccl. 8:1 ¶ Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

Solomon is basically saying that knowledge and wisdom are reflected in one's countenance. It made me think of sitting in class and being eager to be called on with my hand waving in the air, or slinking lower in the seat hoping not to catch the teacher's attention. Solomon makes the comparison of a shining face and a strong, hardened countenance (from the Hebrew for *bold*).

Eccl. 8:2-5 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

It's interesting that as king, Solomon is giving counsel to obey the king's commands. The wording also seems to indicate that the people gave an oath to obey the king at his inauguration. The reference to doing evil seems to be in context with acting in disobedience to the king's commands. The inference seems to be that one who is eager to get out of sight of the king is up to no good and should fear reprisal from the king, who is the absolute authority; no one can challenge his authority. Those, however, who obey the commands of the king have nothing to fear.

The NLT is the only translation that made sense with the last clause: *Those who are wise will find a time and a way to do what is right.*

I also liked Adam Clarke's comments on this section: "It is a matter of great importance to be able to discern WHEN and HOW both to *speak* and *act*; but when *time* and *manner* are both determined, the *matter* comes next. WHAT shall I *speak*? WHAT shall I *do*? *When, how, and what*, answer to *time, manner, and matter*. To discern all these, and act suitably, is a *lesson* for a *philosopher*, and a *study* for a *Christian*."

I think these words are especially applicable to the political atmosphere in America today. We, as Christians, need to remember that the authority of the government is ordained by God.

Romans 13:1-2 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: *the powers that be are ordained of God*. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

Every time we say the Pledge of Allegiance we are declaring our support of the government of the United States of America. It's obvious that we are not always going to like the dictates that issue from our government through any of its branches—executive, legislative or judicial. We are free to exercise our voice

through voting and public discourse within legal parameters. As Christians, however, we should always keep in mind that the only acceptable reason before God for disobeying the dictates of our government is if they require us to disobey God's authority as set forth in His word.

Acts 5:29 "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, **We ought to obey God rather than men.**"

I never really thought it would get to that point in my lifetime, but I am afraid that we who claim Jesus as our Lord and Savior and His word as our authority may be confronted with making such a stand sooner rather than later.

Eccl. 8:6-8 ¶ Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

As I read through the different translations and looked at the Hebrew, I think the NAS gave the best understanding: *For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man's trouble is heavy upon him.* No one knows when misery is going to intrude into one's life, and we shouldn't walk around like Eyegore waiting for it to come.

I think the NIV got it right in comparing one's control over his death to his ability to control the wind; you can control neither one. Just as the soldier is not allowed to walk out on his duties, the wicked will not escape death in spite of their wicked attempts to avoid it (e.g., the deserter).

I liked the thoughts expressed in the NIV Commentary: "Like the king, God has the power of life and death; and, when the time comes for a person to die, he or she cannot insist on retaining the breath of life. Meanwhile, one must press on until the end. There is no escape from the battle by treacherously joining the enemies of the king."

Eccl. 8:9 ¶ All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.

Again, Solomon makes note that his conclusions have been reached using his own wisdom. In this observation, though, the conclusion was obvious—Men often use power and authority to abuse others. I think this is especially true when one with little experience and who rejects God is given such power and authority, and most governments today are proof of this assessment.

Ray Stedman used a quote from John Kenneth Galbraith that seems to be appropriate to our times: "Under capitalism man exploits man; under

communism it is exactly the reverse.” And I might add that you could replace communism with socialism and still have a true statement.

Eccl. 8:10-11 And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

I think the NLT got at the heart of verse 10: *I have seen wicked people buried with honor. How strange that they were the very ones who frequented the Temple and are praised in the very city where they committed their crimes!*

My do the headlines of history declare this truth. I'll not get into identifying specific people, but it should be obvious to any Christian that we live in a world that is quick to honor the wicked when they die. Even in the “church” there is often little discernment exercised in this area. It is true, that only God knows a person's heart. It is also true that scripture declares that by their fruits you shall know them, and for some reason we seem to want to discount the fruit.

Matthew 7:18-20 “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Though the context in Matthew is regarding false prophets, the principle is valid in all discernment regarding those who are good and evil.

Verse 11 is a direct indictment against our judicial system in America today. Evil deeds are not punished for years, if ever, through our court system. People know that with the right amount of cash or the right lawyer looking to make a name for him/herself, they will often get away with light sentences. Though incarceration is not a picnic, neither is it the deterrent it was in the past when prisons were basically dungeons. Today's prisoner is treated to three square meals a day, given access to libraries, computers, TVs, fitness equipment and good medical treatment. It is my belief that our current judicial system does not provide a sufficient deterrent to crime because of political correctness gone amuck.

Eccl. 8:12 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

Eccl. 8:13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

Solomon is speaking with spiritual wisdom in these verses. Though it may seem that the wicked are getting away with their sin over and over again, there is no doubt that God's righteous judgment will prevail in the end. Those who fear God, who reverence Him and look to Him as Lord, can look forward to eternal life; those who have no fear of God will face an eternal existence away from the presence of God in hell.

Matthew 25:41&46 “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, **Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.**”

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire **taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.**”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Eccl. 8:14 ¶ There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.

Solomon again identifies an observation that has evidently caused him much consternation. It’s an observation that has bothered many a child of God. It can’t be denied that good people sometimes suffer at the hands of the wicked, and wicked people seem to be blessed as though they were righteous.

The psalmist struggled with this same issue.

Psalms 73:3&17 “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked....Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.”

God created man and made the decision to give man freedom of choice. When man chose to disobey God, the curse of sin affected not only man but also the creation. God set the laws of science in motion, and the second law of thermodynamics is a fact—the universe is winding down; things are only going to get worse. Until God intervenes, the laws of science and nature will continue to function naturally.

Just as with nature, God allows man to function according to his own choices. Many times those choices are according to the flesh and not in subjection to God’s authority. Most amazing to me is that from before the foundation of the world, God had put a plan in motion that took into account the choices of these billions of people in accomplishing that plan through events that would occur on planet earth. Though we may not always understand why God allows certain things to happen, we can have complete confidence in Him to do what is right and just. Each child of God will be able to look back on the tapestry of his/her life and see how God was using the hard times and “unfair” experiences to accomplish His good. We can take great comfort in the truth that we are not

supposed to understand. The following verses are probably those I've quoted the most in my studies of scripture.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Eccl. 8:15 Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

We are back again to adopting a motto of "eat, drink and be merry"; man should enjoy the simple things of life as he does the work necessary to support his life "under the sun" on planet earth. According to Paul, this is the natural conclusion to make if there is no life after death, there is no spiritual dimension to life.

1Cor. 15:19&32 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable....If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

If Solomon was the wisest man on earth, this is certainly not the most stellar example of his writings. He vacillates constantly from earthly wisdom to spiritual wisdom and back again. You would think that once he gained spiritual enlightenment, he would recognize the value of following that course of thinking. But how often are we guilty of the same? The enemy knows all the deceptive and distracting techniques, and we are so susceptible to influence by the flesh.

Eccl. 8:16 When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also *there is that* neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)

Eccl. 8:17 Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek *it* out, yet he shall not find *it*; yea further; though a wise *man* think to know *it*, yet shall he not be able to find *it*.

As this chapter closes, Solomon declares it to be impossible for a man to find out all the answers about everything there is to know about life here on earth and in the universe. People are constantly working at the things that are important to them—and that is different for every person. There are men who seem to think that they "know it all," but they don't. I think the following three verses sum it up pretty well.

1 Timothy 6:20 "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of **science falsely so called**:"

1 Corinthians 3:19 "For *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*"

Proverbs 14:12 "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."