

Ecclesiastes

Seeing Through a Glass Darkly

Lesson #9 for March 3, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 8.

1. This chapter seems to focus on reasons for obeying the king and the various rewards for the wicked and the righteous. Have you seen a certain amount of repetition from previous lessons? Are you beginning to get some important spiritual lessons from Solomon's words?
2. Why do you think God placed a book in the Bible which seems to raise so many doubts about the future resurrection and the future life? Was Solomon indeed ignorant? Had he not read Job (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27) and David? (Psalms 17:15) Is there more to the future life than what one can find in the book of Ecclesiastes?
3. How many times so far in Ecclesiastes has Solomon complained about the fact that we cannot predict the future?
4. Read again Ecclesiastes 8:2-8. What do you think Solomon was trying to suggest? Was this a demand from the king that his word be obeyed? After all, Solomon was the king! Do these verses help us in understanding the relative importance of our duties to God and to human governments?
5. Was Ecclesiastes 8 the origin of that famous quotation attributed to Benjamin Franklin: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes."
6. Why did Solomon slip back into despondency about not knowing the future? Does that have anything to do with obeying the king?
7. Should Christians hold themselves to a higher standard than the world does? Do we need to tell the truth at all times? Did Abraham and Rahab always tell the truth? Should we always tell the exact and full truth when people ask us how we feel in the morning? Should we always tell patients the full details of their medical condition?
8. There are two ways people have looked at the issue of right living: 1) Right living eventually will lead to a reward in heaven. Or, 2) Right living is its own reward even here and now. Which do you think is more correct? Does righteous living usually lead to rewards in this life? Compare Ecclesiastes 8:11,12; Isaiah 3:10,11; Romans 2:5-9; **Mark 10:29,30**.
9. One of the devil's most successful temptations has been: You don't need to do it now! Do it later! Put it off!
10. Read Ecclesiastes 8:6. How do you understand the following words: "There is a right time and a right way to do everything, but we know so little!" Compare the Message Bible.
11. Several other Bible writers have suggested that, as far as possible, we should obey human governments. (See Romans 13:1-4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17) Notice that in this context, Bible writers emphasize that we should love what is right and do what is good.
12. Do human governments always represent what is good? Are their laws always good? Think of the story of Daniel in the lion's den! (Daniel 6) Even Daniel and his diet. (Daniel 1)
13. We Americans have grown up with the idea of separation of church and state. But we have come to think it is the norm and the way things should be. We need to recognize, however, that this is very much an aberration in our world! Very few governments down through time have stayed out of religion or avoided being dominated by religion.

"Regardless of where we live, we are obligated to obey the law of the land,

even if there are laws we might not, *personally*, like. Notice the use of the word *personally*. There's a world of difference between obeying laws we might not *personally* like and obeying laws that are in violation of God's commandments, laws that directly contradict the basic principles of how God has told us we should live." *Adult Teacher's SS Study Guide*, Sunday, February 25, 2007.

14. What would happen if everyone set himself up as a judge and only agreed to obey the laws that he personally agreed with? Would anybody's life be safe?

We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A 'Thus saith the Lord' is not to be set aside for a 'Thus saith the church' or a 'Thus saith the state.' The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates. E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 68.

15. Our lesson suggests that "the best way to live a godly life is with humility." (*Ibid* 103) What do you think is implied by that statement? Does that mean we should respect human authority? Does it mean that we should limit our own personal likes and dislikes?
16. How do we decide what we personally think is right? How is a conscience born and trained?
17. Does honoring earthly authorities result in honoring God? If an earthly government forced you to obey something that you did not *personally* like or agree with, would it make you more inclined to be a rebel or more inclined to be obedient?
18. Think of those individuals described in the Bible who had to live lives that were in conflict with at least some of their government's or society's requirements. What about Noah, Joseph, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul?
19. What if you happen to live in a land dominated by Muslims? What if you lived in a communist land? If the nation is not basically a Christian nation, at least in name, does that lessen your obligation to the nation?
20. Seventh-day Adventists have held that if the laws of the land are in conflict with the laws of God, the laws of God should take priority. If we believe the government has overstepped its bounds, should we take them to court or engage in civil disobedience? What criteria should we follow in making such a decision?
21. What should we do if we disagree with what the church is doing? If we think the church is making an error, would we ever dare to take the church to court? Or withhold our tithe?
22. In your relationship to the government, or even to God, have you run across many things that you just cannot make sense of? How should we relate to such cases? **Is there a time when we should just "move forward in faith"?** **How do we learn to trust God?** Could we ever come to trust the government or any group of human beings? On what basis? Do you believe that every government on the earth today has been appointed by God?
23. There are many verses in the Bible that talk about the relationship of faith that we should have with God. (Psalms 118:8,9; Psalms 34:8; Proverbs 3:5,6; Isaiah 12:2; Romans 8:28; 14:23; James 2:22)

24. How do you understand the words of Romans 8:28? Look at different translations.

25. Look at Ecclesiastes 8:12-14:

¹²A sinner may commit a hundred crimes and still live. Oh yes, I know what they say: "If you obey God, everything will be all right, ¹³but it will not go well for the wicked. Their life is like a shadow and they will die young, because they do not obey God." ¹⁴But this is nonsense. Look at what happens in the world: sometimes the righteous get the punishment of the wicked, and the wicked get the reward of the righteous. I say it is useless. (*GNB*)

Why do you think this passage from the *Good News Bible* seems to be a contradiction to other translations of this passage? Which more correctly represents the truth as you understand it?

26. What should we do when we see that injustice is prevailing in our world? "Solomon doesn't have the answer; what he does have, however, is a powerful admonition: Don't worry about the evildoer; just be faithful to God, and he will reward you." (*Ibid* 108) Do you believe that statement?

27. Is it ever the Christian's responsibility to try to apprehend evildoers? If you see someone driving drunk on the road, should you call 911? Or should Christians stay out of the government's business?

28. Who is it that is most quick to demand justice? And fairness? Would you agree that Calvary was the greatest injustice that has ever occurred in our world? If you had been there, what would you have done?

29. Read Ecclesiastes 8:16,17. Does this passage suggest that we should stop trying to study God? Is he so far beyond us that we will never comprehend anything about him? Should we stop trying? Do you believe that you can understand something of what God is doing? Or is it impossible for human beings to understand God?

30. Does God ever ask us to just trust him because we cannot understand all the issues that are involved?

31. Think of the enormous progress that has been made in scientific understanding over the last 200 or 300 years. We sometimes get the idea that given enough money and enough time for research, we could find the answer to almost anything!

32. Perhaps one of the best insights into how we are to deal with things we don't understand comes from the book of Job. Though terrible calamities befell Job, when God appears to Job at the end of the book, He doesn't give Job any explanation for the events that ruined his life. (*Ibid* Thursday, 3/1/2007)

Do you think God ever tried to explain things to Job? Where did the material in Job 1 and 2 come from? Did it come from Job? Did Job ever know about chapters 1 and 2? Read Job 38-42. How do these chapters impact you? Have you ever had a Job-like experience?

33. Based on your reading Ecclesiastes 8, would you say that Christians should be gloomy or happy? Are you more inclined to look on the brighter side?

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Info@theox.org

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There are tower builders in our time. Infidels construct their [124] theories from the supposed deductions of sciences, and reject the revealed word of God. They presume to pass sentence upon God's moral government; they despise His law and boast of the sufficiency of human reason. Then, "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." Eccl. 8:11. {PP 123.4}

Jesus is about to leave the mercy seat of the heavenly [208] sanctuary to put on garments of vengeance and pour out His wrath in judgments upon those who have not responded to the light God has given them. "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." **Instead of being softened by the patience and long forbearance that the Lord has exercised toward them, those who fear not God and love not the truth strengthen their hearts in their evil course. But there are limits even to the forbearance of God, and many are exceeding these boundaries. They have overrun the limits of grace, and therefore God must interfere and vindicate His own honor.** {5T 207.4}

Those who profess godliness, yet are not sanctified by the truth which they profess, will not change materially their course of action, which they know is hateful before God, because they are not subjected to the trial of being reproved individually for their sins. They see, by the testimonies of others, their own case faithfully pointed out before them. They are cherishing the same evil. **By continuing their course of sin, they are violating their consciences, hardening their hearts, and stiffening their necks, just the same as though the testimony had been borne directly to them. In passing on and [448] refusing to put away their sins and correct their wrongs by humble confession, repentance, and humiliation, they choose their own way, and are given up to the same, and are finally led captive by Satan at his will. They may become quite bold because they are able to conceal their sins from others and because the judgments of God do not come in a visible manner upon them. They may be apparently prosperous in this world. They may deceive poor, short-sighted mortals and be regarded as patterns of piety while in their sins. But God cannot be deceived. "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. 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: 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."** Although the life of a sinner may be prolonged upon the earth, yet not in the earth made new. He shall be of that number whom David mentions in his psalm: "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth." {2T 447.2}