

CHASE

"LIVING UNDER AUTHORITY" ECCLESIASTES 8:2-17

This Week's Core Competency

Kindness/Goodness – I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*

Kindness is normally considered a personal trait, but George H. W. Bush used the term with respect to a nation. In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention he said this:

The fact is prosperity has a purpose. It is to allow us to pursue "the better angels," to give us time to think and grow. Prosperity with a purpose means taking your idealism and making it concrete by certain acts of goodness. It means helping a child from an unhappy home learn how to read - and I thank my wife Barbara for all her work in literacy. It means teaching troubled children through your presence that there's such a thing as reliable love. Some would say it's soft and insufficiently tough to care about these things. But where is it written that we must act as if we do not care, as if we are not moved? Well I am moved. I want a kinder, gentler nation.

According to Ecclesiastes 8:2-9, the king, who personifies law in particular or government in general, can lord it over others (v. 9) and rain down

The thoughtful keep their thoughts to themselves.

— Derek Kidner

misery on his subjects (v. 6). After all, "he will do whatever he pleases," says the Teacher. "Since the king's word is supreme, who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" The need for wisdom in dealing with the government is obvious. After all, the virtues and vices of the king imply the virtues and vices of law and government. Just as the king can be harsh and unkind to his subjects, so also can law and government be harsh and unkind to its citizens. President Bush's call for a kinder and gentler nation was not only a call for a kinder and gentler populace but also a call for a kinder and gentler government. It goes without saying that bureaucracy can be unkind; just ask anyone who has had to go toe to toe with the IRS, the Social Security Administration, the Veterans Affairs Department, or any of the other Federal Departments or Agencies—there are literally hundreds of them (see <http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal/index.shtml>).

To anyone embroiled with bureaucrats or bureaucracy, the Teacher advises the use of *principle* and *prudence*. Doing what seems right in one's own eyes, especially if it flies in the face of laws, building codes, licensing requirements, etc. is unwise, not to mention the fact that it may very well be illegal. Do what is right, the Teacher advises. At the same time, remember that a wise person will recognize there is "a proper time and procedure for every matter" (v. 6). Go through the proper channels and follow the proper procedures to secure what you want. As one writer says, "Discretion is the chief face of wisdom" in such situations. The same applies when dealing with authorities in general and not just government.

For Discussion

You requested a permit from the city to remodel your home, and it was denied. Your neighbor requested a permit for a similar project, and it was approved. What do you do?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God’s word to put yourself in touch with him.

Ecclesiastes 8:1

1 Who is like the wise man?
Who knows the explanation of things?
Wisdom brightens a man’s face
and changes its hard appearance.

Verses 2-17

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 man’s misery weighs heavily upon him.

7 Since no man knows the future,
who can tell him what is to come?

8 No man has power over the wind to contain it;
so no one has power over the day of his death.

As no one is discharged in time of war,
so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

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 in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.

11 When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. 12 Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. 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.

14 There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. 15 So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man’s labor on earth—his eyes not seeing 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 his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Box "because" and "since" indicating *reason* in vv. 2, 4, 7, 13, 15.

* Circle "oath" in v. 2.

* Bracket "leave the king's' presence" in v. 3.

* Circle "bad cause" in v. 3.

* Underline "proper time and procedure" in vv. 5, 6.

* Circle "misery" in v. 6.

* Box "so" indicating *comparison* in v. 8.

* Underline "all this" in v. 9.

* Circle "a man" in v. 9.

* Bracket "his own" in v. 9.

* Underline "praise" in v. 10.

* Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 13.

* In the margin next to v. 17 write, "Cf., 3:11."

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Read verse 1. Put what the Teacher wants his readers to know about "the wise man" in your own words.

2. In verse 2 he advises his readers to "obey *the king's* command." Apply the Teacher's advice to twenty-first century people living in a democracy.

3. Summarize what he tells his readers about dealing with "the king" in verses 3-6.

4. The "misery" he mentions in verse 6 is aggravated by factors mentioned in verses 7-8. How so?

5. Identify the "man" who "lords it over others to **their** hurt."

6. What makes the scene described in verse 10 so senseless?

7. Explain the *contrast* used in verses 12-13.

8. What makes the senseless scene in verse 14 even more outrageous than the one in verse 10?

9. **Discussion:** Talk about why the Teacher commends the enjoyment of life based on what he says in verses 15-17.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Ecclesiastes 8:2-17 reads like a collection of scattered thoughts; fitting them into a coherent whole isn't easy. The diversity among English translations indicates as much. The more literal the translation, the more obscure the sense (cf., ESV); the more clear the sense, the more periphrastic the translation (cf., GNT). To make matters worse, the meaning of many verses is very obscure. Interpretive difficulties aside, one author captures the "feeling" readers get from the passage in these pointed words: "At every turn this chapter will face us with our inability to call the tune and master our affairs. On one level after another we find ourselves pinned down, hunted down and disorientated" (Derek Kidner, *A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance*, 74).

Commentators widely disagree as to how the passage should be divided. Two, however, agree that it should be divided in two (James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, OTL, 148, 153; Donald R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 996-97). Crenshaw labels the first part (vv. 1-9) "Rulers and Subjects" and the second part (vv. 10-17) "The Mystery of Divine Activity." In the first part, the Teacher tells his readers how to deal with "the king," who personifies law in particular or perhaps government in general. First, he advises them to carry out their responsibilities as law-abiding citizens. After all, the king is the king, and the law is the law (v. 4). And just as disagreeing with the king is no excuse for disobeying the king, so also is disagreeing with the law no excuse for disobeying the law (v. 3). Besides, those who obey the law have nothing to fear. Second, he advises them to go through proper channels and follow proper procedures when dealing with bureaucrats and bureaucracy. "There is a proper time and procedure for every matter," he says. Daniel illustrates perfectly what the Teacher has in mind. When he "resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine" provided by the king (Da 1:8), he went to the guard set over him by the chief official and requested that he and his three friends be given "nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink" (v. 12). In this way, both *principle* (Ecc 8:2) and *prudence* (v. 5) set limits on a wise

person's freedom.

In the second part (vv. 10-17) the Teacher tells his readers that no one, not even a wise person, can understand God's judgments. In verse 10 he begins by describing a particularly senseless scene. One commentator explains how so. "There are few things more obnoxious than the sight of wicked men flourishing and complacent. Yet wickedness respected and given the blessing of religion (10a) is even more sickening. In the spectacle described here, the sycophants have not even the excuse of ignorance. The villains are being honoured at the very scene of their misdeeds—and they are no longer alive to cast their spell of fear or favour over anyone. So, incredibly enough, the admiration must be genuine, making it very clear that popular moral judgment can be totally astray, swayed by the evidence of success or failure, and construing heaven's patience as its approval" (Kidner, 77). How enigmatic!

Fortunately, God is not persuaded by public opinion. The Teacher makes this perfectly clear in verses 11-13 by describing the exception that proves the rule. "Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God," he says (v. 12). One wicked man may appear to live forever, but wicked men in general do not live that long (v. 13).

In verse 14 he describes an even more outrageous scene than the one described in verse 10, one that turns God's judgment upside down—"righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve." One writer describes such topsy-turvy justice this way: "A moment ago we were reminded of the general rule that wickedness digs its own grave, and righteousness, so to speak, its own garden. But all too often the pattern reverses, to make nonsense of itself; for there is no sure way of knowing when—let alone why—life will rain down on us the next blow or the next windfall" (78).

In light of all he has said about "Rulers and Subjects" and "The Mystery of Divine Activity," the Teacher concludes with words familiar to his readers: "So I commend the enjoyment of life," he

says (v. 15). This he does for a number of reasons that he goes on to explain in the following verses: 1) because "there is nothing better to do than to eat and drink and be glad" (v. 15); 2) because "Joy will accompany him in

his work all the days of his life" (v. 15); 3) because "no one can comprehend what goes on under the sun" (v. 16); and 4) because "even if a wise man claims he knows, he really cannot comprehend it" (v. 17).

The Message of the Passage

Although it's better to be wise than foolish, especially when dealing with authority, no one, not even a wise person, can understand life's enigmas; therefore eat and drink and be glad so joy can be yours all your days.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 2 ***oath before God*** Lit., "oath of God." "Whether the oath of God is God's legitimation of the king, or the subject's oath of loyalty (either is possible), it put the matter in any case on a religious footing" (Kidner, 75; cf., Crenshaw, 150). Other possibilities include: a genitive of location (oath before God) [cf., NIV, NET] or adjectival genitive of attribute (supreme oath) [cf., NASB] (the NET Bible, 10^{tn} on Ecc 8:2). "Evidently it was a custom for the king's subject to take an oath of loyalty . . . here the oath is one taken more generally among the populace" (Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC, 118).
- v. 3 ***leave*** "To go from someone's presence' elsewhere signifies disaffection or disloyalty (cf. Ho. 11:2)" (Eaton, 118). "People should obey the king, maintain allegiance to him (do not be in a hurry to leave his presence, i.e., as suggested by the Heb. to resign from his service, cf. 10:4)" (Glenn, 996).
- v. 3 ***a bad cause*** I.e., any disloyalty (Eaton, 119) or rebellion (Glenn, 996); cf., "Don't try to avoid doing your duty, and don't stand with those who plot evil, for the king can do whatever he wants" (NLT).
- v. 5 ***proper time*** The Heb. word "connotes 'a proper, suitable time for an event; the right moment'" (the NET Bible, 18^{tn} on Ecc 8:5).
- v. 6 ***misery*** "The word for 'misery' (*ra'ah*) is related to the word for 'harm' (*ra'*) in verse 5" (Glenn, 996). This may explain why the NET attributes the "misery" in question to "harm" from the king in 5a; cf., "for the oppression of the king is severe upon his victim."
- v. 8 ***so*** The term indicates comparison, e.g., "so also" or "just as" in 8a; cf., "as . . . so" in 8b.
- v. 9 ***all this*** The paragraph divisions in the NIV indicate "all this" begins a new section (cf., NLT); other translations indicate that it concludes the previous section (cf., ESV, NET, NRSV, NKJV). According to one scholar, "Most scholars believe that *All of this* introduces a summary statement that concludes the previous unit. A few others, for instance, Ernst Hengstenberg and Roland Murphy, dissent from this view and believe that the phrase is looking forward to the verses that follow. It is somewhat unclear. Nonetheless, the previous use of the phrase as well as the verbal link between have power and words with the root *slt* in the previous verses tip the scale in favor of the view that v. 9 is a conclusion, not an introduction" (Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT, 215). According to another, verse 9 bridges the two sections. "So in summarizing his observations in 8:2-8 the Preacher also starts a new line of thought" (Eaton, 121).
- v. 9 ***a man*** I.e., "the king" (vv. 2, 5, 6). "8:1-9 focuses on the absolute power of the king, so the referent of [a man] is probably the king" (the NET Bible, 32^{tn} on Ecc 8:9). "The consequences Solomon had in view here resulted from a ruler's anger (the harm a wise man can escape by proper decorum; cf. 8:1) as is clear from verse 9 where Solomon referred to a ruler lording it over others to their hurt" (Glenn, 997).
- v. 9 ***his own*** See NIV margin "their hurt." "The NIV marg., 'to their hurt,' is preferred to 'to his own hurt.' The pronoun refers back to 'others' which is lit., 'adam, 'men'" (997).
- v. 10 ***praise*** "This verse vies for the most difficult in the book . . . It is clear that the verse does speak of the *wicked* and of the *holy place*, and since it concludes with the 'meaningless' formula, there must be some anomalous connection between the holy place and the wicked that contributes to Qohelet's feeling that the wicked do not get what they deserve . . . The wicked may indeed die, but even then they are buried and praised in the city where they did their evil deeds and religious posturing. It is the fact that the wicked continue to receive the praise owed to the righteous [cf., v. 14] that frustrates Qohelet and leads him to utter his conclusion that 'this is meaningless'" (Longman, 218-219). "Such a contradiction of the doctrine of retribution was meaningless (*hebel*; cf. 1:2) or enigmatic [cf., NET]" (Glenn, 997).
- v. 13 ***their days*** The Problem: "Qohelet here flatly contradicts what he stated in v. 12a and continues the line of thought he began in v. 12b. In v. 12a he expressed his frustration that sinners live a long time. Here he states just as baldly that the wicked will not live a long time, and that they will not live long because they do not fear God" (Longman, 220). Possible solutions: "Leupold sees a play on words which may be paraphrased: 'though he go on long (in sin) he shall not make his days long'" (Eaton, 123); or perhaps, "What he may also be faintly raising in our minds is the thought of an after-life for the godly. If so, he does it by an unresolved paradox about the wicked-for in the same breath he tells of the villain both prolonging and failing to prolong his life (12, 13). This could mean that whereas the godly man has hope beyond the grave, the ungodly has no one: however long postponed, death will be the end for him" (Kidner, 77).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Special note to parents: Our summer series in the book of Ecclesiastes is called Life on Mission.

Have you had those moments in your house when you think, "I have totally lost control!" On a recent Saturday morning I came downstairs to find opened bags of potato chips and soda cans all over the living room, teenagers sleeping soundly in front of a blaring TV and to top it off - the water faucet had been left on! How long had the water been running? And how can a person walk away from the water faucet and not realize it is running? It was time to revisit the house rules. My kids had momentarily "forgotten" that they were living under a certain authority - their dad and me! *The Message Bible* translates Ecclesiastes 8:2-3 as, "Do what your king commands; you gave a sacred oath of obedience. Don't worryingly second-guess your orders or try to back out when the task is unpleasant. You're serving his pleasure, not yours. The king has the last word." My kids definitely think that tasks they are required to do around the home are "unpleasant," but they also know that when they do them, we all live more peacefully. How true that is when we live under the Father's authority. He is the Supreme Authority and has the last word in our hearts and in our homes. This week, pray as a family and revisit your house rules to make sure you are living for His pleasure!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Ecclesiastes 8:2-17

1. Why are we to obey the king's command?
2. Fill in the sentence, "Whoever obeys his command will come to no _____, and the _____ in heart will know the proper time and procedure." (v. 5)

What Do You Think

1. Is God honored when we obey those in authority over us?
2. Who is the Ultimate Authority in our lives?
3. How does honoring your parents honor God?

What R U Going To Do

Make a list of all the people who are in authority over you. Don't forget teachers, police officers, elected officials and your parents! Post the list where you will remember to pray for these people each day and thank God that He is our Ultimate Authority!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Kindness/Goodness - Treating others better than myself

Memory Verse

Colossians 1:20 - "... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC _____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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