

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Thirty)

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The Old Testament is divided into three sections. The three sections are: the law, the prophets, and the writings. The writings are termed at times as the wisdom books, and within the wisdom books, seeking wisdom is strongly emphasized as a major guide to a well lived life.

The wisdom books include both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs 4, wisdom is termed the principle thing, but we are learning as we proceed through Ecclesiastes 8, and we will see it again when we get into Ecclesiastes 9, that wisdom is not the answer to every one of life's problems. Even wisdom has its limitations.

Ecclesiastes 8 continues this subject regarding the importance of wisdom and dealing with the relationship problems that invariably arise during the course of one's life. However, two significant subjects arise during this chapter's course, and it begins by stating in verse 1:

Ecclesiastes 8:1 Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.

It begins by stating in verse 1 that wisdom is a valuable virtue for transforming for good. Some things transform us in the wrong way, but wisdom transforms a person for good. It makes a face shine. This is the manner in which Solomon chose to illustrate this. Shine appears to illustrate smiling as a result of the pleasure in what is accomplished using wisdom. Smiling or shining indicates a sense of well being.

The flow of the chapter very quickly turns to the subject of wisdom. The wisdom of deference, which focused on dealing with those in authority, especially the king. For the broadest understanding when you are studying, it is helpful to analyze this—not limiting deference due only to a king, others must be deferred to in Christian conduct as well. As we will learn a little bit later the primary one that Solomon has in his mind at that time is the king. This subject co-ordinates beautifully with Romans 13:1-7, and other references in the New Testament.

The apostles Paul and Peter made clear that God expects us as His children to be

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humble before all, being careful not to give cause for offense regardless of whom we are before. Giving deference must not be reduced to merely a clever manipulation used to make one's point. We are always to take into account God's involvement in His creation as its sovereign ruler, and that we are pilgrims in a land that is not ours. Therefore, we are to treat with preferential kindness even those who falsely accuse us.

The second change in the subject material of this chapter is concluded in its last verse. It is that we must be armed with a specific fact of life. Always remember this, that fact is that wisdom is not the perfect answer to deflecting every difficulty in life away from us. Solomon is letting us know that the use of wisdom has some limitations—even though it is always good, and even though it should be tried, it must be understood that it might not always work the way we would like it to work.

This is partly because there is at least one major overriding reason for this. It is God Himself. He is always ruling, He is always working out His purpose within His creation, and His purpose overrides even what would normally be the wise course of action to take to avoid a difficulty.

Wisdom will not always work, because sometimes God Himself has His own ideas of what He is working out. He will make sure that our wisdom does not work for His purpose, so we have not failed. We might feel like we have failed, because things seem to go awry, but they have not really failed at all. We worry about it, but it was God Himself who sometimes made sure it did not work, because He is working something else out.

When we finished on August 1, we were in Romans 13. I want you to turn there so that we will be reminded of what it says here.

Romans 13:1-7 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good, but if you do evil be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due; taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to

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whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Right off the top, these verses confirm that God established civil government and that we are to deal with human governments understanding God's continuing active involvement in and through them. In other words, God does not establish government and then wander off somewhere and pay no attention to what is going on. We are always to assume that God is involved.

Thus the deference given those human government personalities is given by us because of God's involvement, not because those humans are so great in their accomplishments or their personalities. These people maybe downright evil, demanding, and dangerous to life and limb.

The sum and substance of this is that we are always to conduct ourselves as in God's presence. This awareness of God is not a cringing fear of doing something wrong, but a humble expectation that He is always near for guidance. He is overseeing things in an attitude of love.

Where we specifically left off I was showing you two things. God gave Israel specific instructions regarding what they could and could not do in relation to other nations as they approached the Promises Land. In addition to that, specific instruction regarding their own governance.

Please turn to Exodus 18. Remember they are away from Egypt a short period of time and God is already beginning to establish government within His people. The speaker is not God but it is Moses' father-in-law.

Exodus 18:17-27 So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. [We should be able to see clearly that what Jethro is doing. He is establishing a government in steps, one over the other, all leading up in authority to Moses

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and then Moses understands clearly that over him is God.] And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge, so that it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. [This is not much different from the government in the United States. There are different levels of courts that lead up to the Supreme Court.] If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.” So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people; rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.

Turn to Deuteronomy 1. This is forty years later and Moses is writing a summary here of the things that occurred along the way to the border of the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 1:9-13 [Moses is speaking to the children of Israel] “And I spoke to you at that time, saying; ‘I alone am not able to bear you. [This shows the timing of what he is saying here.] The Lord your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude. May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you. How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints? Choose wise, understanding and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.’

Are you beginning to see a change? With Exodus 18, this gives us an idea that Moses did all of the choosing, and now we are finding a clarification of that. You can see that the clarification is really very logical because how many people did Moses actually have enough conversations with, business with, out of millions of people? He knew these people all well enough to appoint them because he knew their background, their wisdom, their understanding.

Deuteronomy 1:14-17 “And you answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have told us to do is good.’ [Moses did not choose all of these people, he gave that responsibility over to those who were familiar with their tribes.]

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So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring it to me, and I will hear it.'

That statement, 'the judgment is God's' is a promise to them that God would make them discerning and able to understand the cases that they were going to be hearing.

The clarification is this: when Jethro told Moses to do the choosing, Moses carried through but he was hit with a problem—he really did not know very many people. When you are dealing with twelve tribes and millions of people, he just knew a very few number of people, so he turned that responsibility, using the authority that God gave him, over to the people of Israel, and the people of Israel then chose the people to represent them.

What we see here is very intriguing because, how did the people settle who was going to represent them in each and every tribe? They may have voted, they knew one another fairly well, and each tribe then chose the people that were going to represent them, first before Moses, and then before God.

What this means in practical application is that in this world God did not appoint every leader of every nation in every circumstance. We can see that He very clearly turned that responsibility over to Moses, and to the children of Israel, then God accepted the people's confidence in the leaders that they chose. Then He had to pass on what He knew about those people, and apparently He did.

That brings us to an assumption. That is, despite the character, the personality, the evilness of the leaders we have, let us say, in the United States of America, did He actually appoint Barack Obama? We do not know, or did He allow us to make the choice of Barack Obama and God passed on it and He passed on it because Barack Obama had the personality and the character to fill the role that He wanted Him to fill at this time and His purpose?

If God did not absolutely want him he would have never been there. God is still

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exercising His authority, so this leads us to an assumption that we must make. That is, we should always assume that God has passed on this person and that we are before someone that God has then set in this responsibility. That is why we must treat each one of these people as though we are in the presence of God. Therefore, because we must assume His passing on those in office, they must be treated with respect as His personal agent, because that is what it says there in Romans 13.

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Even though He did not literally pick them, He did pass on them, and therefore they become appointed by God by His allowing them to be there.

Romans 13:5 Therefore, you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake.

It is good to understand what he says here and that is that God extends our responsibility to submit to government as a means of keeping our conscience clear. We do not want to be guilty of breaking the nation's laws either. In addition, pay taxes so the state can afford to employ these civil servants but also he goes on to show us in the very last part, that we are to also submit to community customs regarding them and even to give them honor.

From here we are going to go to I Timothy 2 as we extend this responsibility out. This is part of our responsibility concerning those who are in authority over us. This is becoming evermore important as time moves on.

I Timothy 2:1-3 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

These verses extend our responsibilities to those that God has placed over us. We are commanded to pray for them in order that their functions are carried out, especially for the well being of God's purpose. Verse 1 might require an entire sermon to explain it

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thoroughly, but it does not impact directly on this particular subject. This is partly because Paul includes all men, plus specific means we are to employ in our concern for the advancement of God's purpose. However, verse 2 addresses only kings, and we are dealing with kings in Ecclesiastes 8, we are dealing with kings in authority in Romans 13.

Verse 2 addresses only kings, and all who are in authority. The term 'all' broadens the application of our responsibilities considerably because it goes down to senators, representatives, and on and on it goes, all the way down the line. This verse also tells us why we are to pray for them.

In this case we are to do this for our own well being this is one reason. An atmosphere of peace, though not absolutely essential to growth, helps to ensure greater growth, because turmoil within a society, within a culture, tends to make us focus on saving ourselves and that stunts growth.

This reason is rising in magnitude of importance as time moves on and the world becomes more antagonistic to us. Prayer for them is in an additional service by which we both serve and honor those in authority, and also serve and honor those who are a part of the work of God. The overall purpose is given here so that we can lead quiet and peaceful lives.

Paul is not urging us to live a life of ease, but rather that the church as a body, and us as individuals, are free to complete our responsibilities. Remember I told you earlier, where there is an atmosphere of chaos within a culture we turn in on ourselves in order to protect ourselves, to save our lives, to save us from injury, to take care of ourselves.

The first term 'quiet,' that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, covers being able to live a life free from outward disturbance. In other words, that the leaders be restrained from directly persecuting the church, or us as individuals. Be reminded of the way things are going in the United States. Slowly but surely the intensity of that anger and suspicion of the church is growing in people's minds, and you can be sure that Satan is going to stir it up because eventually he will go to the sources that he needs to get rid of.

The second term is 'peaceful.' This applies to a life which is free from inner turmoil. Quiet and peaceful touch on the fear of being persecuted, either by the state, or by individuals in a neighborhood, or even the family giving problems.

The seven verses in Romans 13 show three specific reasons why humans must be governed. There is a fairly obvious overall reason as well. The first specific reason is:

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law abiding citizens must be protected, whether or not they are in the church is not the issue. You can see that God made the covenant and He immediately established a governing unit within the nation.

The second specific reason is: evil doers must be restrained. Those who are minding their own business have to be protected and evil doers must be restrained.

The third specific reason is: orderly government promotes the general welfare of all. In other words, where things are orderly it permits people to work, to make money, to buy, to sell, marry. Chaos stops all of those things.

The overall reason is, without a doubt, civil government anarchy would result. Anarchy is insanity, it is sheer madness. Without order, God's entire purpose would not be possible—everything would grind to a halt as people attacked or were attacked, and life would be spent trying to make sure that one continued to live. That is why there is government.

You can begin to see that once you have government you have power being exercised. That becomes important as we move through this.

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

Please understand that Romans 13 does not imply that we must *always* obey civil government. Verses and contexts such as we just read (we can see that through the book of Acts chapter 5), shows the principle that we must obey civil government only as long as man's laws do not contradict God's laws, which those who make those laws probably do not understand and would not even care if they did grasp them.

Nothing in Romans 13 suggests, that even though the government may be very oppressive, we are nowhere given permission to join with any rebellious group intending on revolting and throwing the mistreating government out of office by force. Do you understand the reason why? It is very simple. God does not consider our citizenship in this nation any longer. We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We have absolutely no legal right to violate His standard.

The best example of this is Jesus Himself. He had all of this power, He had all of this wisdom, and yet He never even one time intervened in the Jewish government (or the Roman government), to stop what was going on, even though He was living under the

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midst of some really violent personalities. He did not try to get rid of them. We have no permission from God to do such a thing. We do have permission to violate their laws if those laws are in violation of God's laws. Otherwise we just have to bear with it.

Daniel 4:17 This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowliest of men.

Daniel 4:17 [NIV] The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones, the messengers declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and gives them to anyone He wishes, and sets over them the lowliest of men.

That is a pretty clear statement. It means that since it is indisputable that God is sovereign regardless of the personality and character of those in office, we must assume that God has passed on them and out of respect for Him, we give them respect. It is not easy to do but it is what God expects of us.

We give them deference because of God who put them into office. We do not want to be found disagreeing with God's choice of whom He, with all of His wisdom and His purpose, put in that office. It is hard to pray for Obama, but we have to do it. Pray for him even for our own good, for the church's good, and for God's purpose. All three of these are working together at the same time. So there is reason why we have to pray for him and all the other leadership that have sold their souls to others.

This verse points out an understanding that we must never forget because it feeds right back into Ecclesiastes 8:17. That is the one that says, people will be looking for reasons and they will not be able to find it.

Unseen to all except for those who truly live by faith, is that God is always working out His purpose. God never abandons His responsibility to complete what He has begun, He gives it His attention all of the time. It is *His* will that will be done. God is not an absentee landlord, He is always governing. Therefore though He appoints those in office, or allows them to be established in that position of authority, He is not responsible for their sins—the sins they commit in office—any more than He was responsible for Adam and Eve's sin. Those people have free moral agency.

As I showed you in previous Ecclesiastes sermons, there was a measure of

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deliberateness to Adam and Eve's sins, they and we choose to sin, and those in governmental positions of authority have free moral agency too. There is a measure of deliberateness in their sins too as they carry out their agenda. God has His agenda, men have their agenda. Those men in authority probably have only a small awareness of God, if they have that much. Their mind is on their agenda, and what they want to accomplish. Sometimes they do awful, terrible things, but God always works around them in order to bring His will to pass, regardless of what men do.

They, like us, are responsible for their sins and they have to answer to Him for their conduct. Evelyn and I recently watched a documentary regarding the dating of the Exodus which clearly exemplifies what some in positions of authority sometimes do.

This position of authority is in archaeology. Some archaeologists and historians are deliberately hiding the true dating of the true Exodus. I do not say this meaning that they are hypocritically lying. I am saying that they so firmly believe their dating they strongly resist any alternate information in order to maintain their error-filled dating of Egyptian history. This has a dilatory effect.

I believe that it is more than a lack of humility regarding these people—much of their stubbornness is nothing more than old fashioned pride. But the effect of their stubborn resistance is to deliberately reject the Bible as the Word of God, by scoffing at its reliability. Using the Bible you are going to come up with a date that is about two hundred years different from what the archaeologists come up with.

People in governmental leadership positions do the same thing. You hear people joke about it on the radio about the twist that they put on things. Those people reporting the news know that they are lying, they will not say it but they talk about the twist and how they carefully parse words in order to make it appear that they are not lying. Those people are going to answer to God for what they are doing.

Turn to Romans 1. Sometimes what we catch these people doing puts us in a quandary. God is talking about people in positions of authority.

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Sometimes this puts us in somewhat of a quandary, because we shake our head in disbelief, marveling as to why they cannot grasp something that is so simple and clear to us. But the effect of their stubborn resistance is to deliberately reject the Bible. There is a simple reason for you and I to hold in our mind, it appears in II Corinthians 5.

II Corinthians 5:5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Here is a simple truth, simple to grasp, but can still leave us wondering why this has happened. Why me? Why are we prepared to understand and they are not? These people with long letters after their name, these people who hold a position of grave and great, powerful responsibility, they somehow cannot get it through their heads what seems so simple to us. God rules and we are to keep His commandments. It is not difficult at all, but we are prepared, made to be enabled to be a believer of this.

John 15:16 “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.”

God has enabled us to understand things that are so simple and so clear to us, and yet to them it is mass confusion and their minds will not accept it. Why me? We will never know the answer to that except to say what God says in Deuteronomy 7, “I chose you because I love you.” Jesus said, “I did not choose you because you were great, mighty, intelligent, I chose you because I love you.” That is hard for us to realize but that is the simple truth, that God has withheld from these people and why they act so stupidly. There is no wisdom to what they say, there is no wisdom to what they do. Their minds are completely elsewhere in terms of what they want to accomplish.

We want to please God, that is all we want. They do not want to please God, they have accepted humanism. What Ralph Waldo Emerson did pervaded the entire United States, he did it two hundred years ago, people accepted it then, they spread it and now it is accepted as being truth.

This has been going on since God began choosing people to work through, this one was Isaiah,

John 12:38-40 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: “Lord who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of

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the Lord been revealed?” Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.”

That is a mind that we cannot fully understand, but He is working things out and for some reason He chose us to reveal Himself to. How much of Himself He reveals to us is not much, but what we know is something that we have an advantage over other people who do not have it, and we are accounted to God to make good use of it.

We are seeing a way in which He wants it to be used—we respect those that He has put in office because of Him and not because of them. I think that the time is coming where this is going to become very important to our lives. We are going to be confronted by the powers of this world in order that the persecution of God's church begins to take place.

A key factor for us is to never forget that through baptism—this is something I hope will help us to have a firm stance within because it is part of our life now—we cut a deal with God. I am using very common terminology, we made a deal with God. That deal is called a covenant. The deal that He offered us is called the New Covenant. The New Covenant is an agreement—it is an agreement that has terms to it—in which God says I will do this but you have to do this.

We made the deal with God. Why? Because God gave us the ability to weigh how much was in our favor and we took Him up on it. So, He forgave our sins. Until we cut the deal with Him, the sins remained unforgiven, and the death of Jesus Christ did not pay them. Once they paid them, then God began to fulfill His part of the deal—He gave us His Spirit in addition to forgiving our sins. He made us a part of His church, He put us into His family, He adopted us, He gave us eternal life and the hope that we could be there.

Everything is weighted in our favor but, we must not ever forget that we cut this deal with Him. Every year at the Feast of Tabernacles I counsel people for baptism. I try to help give these people the understanding that they are making a covenant, a deal, an agreement with God in which they, in turn for the forgiveness of sin, in turn for God's Holy Spirit, in turn for being made a part of His family, and hundreds of other blessings, He will heal, He will hear us—we have access to Him in prayer. Everything is weighted to our favor, except for one thing, we have to give Him our life.

Are we willing to do this? It is important for us to understand because this is what we get in return, the ability to understand.

Luke 14:25-27 And great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

This is what we must give in return, our life from that point on. You understand that God wants to create Himself, create Jesus Christ in us. It takes our co-operation for this to be done. We have choices to make. He gives us every bit of equipment we need to enable us to fulfill our responsibility. Our responsibility is to live His way of life before the world and that is how this creation goes hand in hand with His power. What we are looking at today is just one small segment of that responsibility.

What we have to fight on our part in fulfilling our responsibility is also (that is one thing that we have to never forget, we cut a deal with God), the next thing we have to remember and not forget is: our human nature does not want us to relinquish its enslavement of us. That is why Solomon cautions that wisdom has limitations. God is always working and if He sees that—even though we are doing many things right—something that He wants to get out of us, He will squash even the right choices that we make.

It is not that the wisdom is wasted when things seem to go awry, rather at this time it did not appear on the surface to work. And it is always wisdom to submit to God regardless of whether it immediately appears on the surface or not. Good results are not the issue in a life of faith. We have been prepared to live by faith and what we must learn is that God's purposes take precedence over all else.

God's character never changes, what He chooses to do is never wrong for us. That is what we gave our life to His authority to use as He sees fit, being good for both us and His purposes. It is a truth that our Creator has plans and purposes that we are not aware of and thus He overrules at times the wisdom we faithfully used for the sake of His purpose.