

Ecclesiastes 8

Civil duties, certainty of just judgment, and the inability of wisdom (chapter 8)

Civil duties (v. 1–9)

Verse one asks, "Who is like a wise man?" Qohelet searched for a wise man, who knew the interpretation of a thing. Qohelet knew that wisdom makes a man happier. "The shining face generally speaks of favour. Here it speaks of the wise man who is visibly gracious in his demeanour, and (as the next phrase says) whose gentleness is obvious in his facial expression." [1] Compare to Numbers 6:25.

In verse two, Qohelet advises to obey the command of the king. In Romans 13, Paul gives similar command to obey the government. Primarily, we honor government authority as part of our obedience to God. "It appears that the Jewish princes and chiefs took an oath of fidelity to their kings. This appears to have been done to David, 2 Samuel 5:1–3; to Joash, 2 Kings 11:17; and to Solomon, 1 Chronicles 29:24." [2] We can agree with Qohelet's advice here, from both an Old Testament and New Testament perspective. Yet one must say that it sounds self-serving if Qohelet was Solomon, who was a king himself.

We also recognize that we are always to obey God rather than man if the two contradict (Acts 4:19). "Many passages in the Old Testament witness to the limits which loyalty to God must set on courtly tact and submissiveness." [3]

If the lack of wisdom discouraged Qohelet in Ecclesiastes 8:6–7, he found the powerlessness of man in the face of death to be yet more despairing. Under the sun, he saw that death allows no winners, and there is no release from that war. He knew that part of man's misery on this earth was to be ruled by others oppressively.

The certainty of just judgment (v. 10–13)

Qohelet saw that the wicked die, and their evil is soon forgotten. With his *under the sun* thinking, Qohelet despaired that the wicked are not punished after death.

In verse 12–13 Qohelet says that it will be well with the righteous and not well with the wicked.

The inability of wisdom (v. 14–17)

[1] Eaton
[2] Clarke
[3] Kidner