

## Wisdom Trumps Foolishness Part Two

### Eccles 8 & 9

Let's turn together to Ecclesiastes 8. We're going to try to cover the rest of chapter 8 and a good portion of chapter 9, so we won't have the time to go over every verse but let's begin by reading 8:7-13.

*7 Since no one knows the future,  
who can tell someone else what is to come?*

*8 As no one has power over the wind to contain it,  
so<sup>[a]</sup> no one has power over the time of their 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<sup>[b]</sup> hurt. <sup>10</sup> Then too, I saw the wicked buried—those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise<sup>[c]</sup> in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.*

*11 When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. <sup>12</sup> Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. <sup>13</sup> Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.*

Wisdom has been called the ability to live life skillfully. Life is complicated and unpredictable and there is no formula that, if you plug in, makes every problem go away, every relationship wonderful, and every dream come true. We've seen over and over again in Ecclesiastes that sometimes bad things happen to the righteous, and good things happen to the wicked. *Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? (vs. 7).* Wisdom isn't a formula and it doesn't guarantee a carefree life.

But what Solomon does tell us is that wisdom is always a way better way to live than foolishness. In the end *it will go better with those who fear*

*God...and because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them.*

Fearing God and not fearing God is another way of describing wisdom and foolishness. Prov. 9:10 tells us that the fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom. And Ps. 14:1 says *the fool has said in his heart, "there is no God."* Wisdom and foolishness are primarily established by our posture towards God. So let's take a couple minutes to consider what the fear of the Lord is.

## **The fear of God**

Fear isn't usually something we want. There are over 500 listed phobias (fears), ranging from fear of spiders to the fear of clowns. You name it, someone's afraid of it. From pogonophobia (fear of beards) to turophobia (fear of cheese) to pentheraphobia (fear of your mother in law), there are hundreds and hundreds of phobias.

Some phobias we understand, like galeophobia (fear of sharks), while other fears are harder to understand and even a little amusing like geniophobia which is the fear of chins. What is scary about a chin? And if someone has a fear of beards *and* a fear of chins they're in for a pretty lonely life. How many people do you know that don't have a beard or a chin? But the reality is that for those who suffer from a phobia it's anything but funny. Even when the fear is completely irrational they can really negatively affect our lives.

And then this fear comes along that the Bible says is good for us. Ps. 19:9 says that the fear of the Lord is clean - it is good for us. It doesn't mess with our minds, it clears our minds. It's the fear that is necessary for a life well lived, the beginning of wisdom.

For the Christian, the fear of the Lord isn't terror. Through Jesus our terror of God has been taken away because in Christ our sins have been forgiven and we are reconciled to God as sons and daughters. God doesn't want us to live in terror of Him, He wants us to live in the knowledge of His great love for us.

So the fear of the Lord isn't a terror kind of fear. Instead, the fear of the Lord is a deep sense of awe and reverence for Who God is. The fear of

the Lord is walking life out with an awareness of God in everything we do, always seeking to honor and reverence Him in everything we do. Living in the fear of the Lord is living our lives knowing that God is always with us and always watching us.

When we live in this place of reverence and awareness of God, He becomes like a compass for our lives directing our steps, influencing our choices, molding our character, and all of this adds up to redirecting the trajectory of our lives in a God-fearing, God-glorifying direction. Our lives are guided by God, and that is wise because God knows best.

Now back to Ecclesiastes.

### **The fear of God helps give us a higher perspective of life**

In the Healing Journey teaching, Brian and Cindy Sherwood talk about the difference between the perspective on a mountaintop and the perspective in a landfill surrounded by mounds of trash. They call the one the peak perspective and the other the dirt perspective. If we have a dirt perspective, we can't see very far, all we see are the problems and challenges and messes around us. Or, all we see is the instant gratification that we want so badly and we do things that feel good now without thinking about the ultimate consequences of our actions which ultimately lands us in places that we don't want to be.

The fear of the Lord helps give us a peak perspective on life. It helps us see more than the immediate snapshot of life right now, and gives us a broader, farther view of life so we see, not just the immediate results but the down the road results of our actions.

Recently I read about a motorist who was crossing over a bridge at night when he noticed the lights of the car in front of him suddenly disappear. They were there one minute, gone the next. Concerned, he slowed down and stopped just in time to see that there was a gaping hole in the bridge just ahead of him. A boat had hit the bridge supports and the center of the bridge collapsed. This motorist quickly got out of his car and tried to warn other motorists, but several cars ignored his warnings and sped by him (probably thinking he was a crazy man) and plunged 80 feet to their death. Finally an alert tractor trailer driver stopped and when he realized what had happened, he parked his truck sideways to stop oncoming

traffic.

When Solomon stands on the bridge and looks at just that moment in time, just the immediate situation around him, it looks like the wicked and godless are the ones getting ahead in life. As they buzz by him he sees that they are living large and laughing it up!

- Some are getting ahead in life by lording it over others - *There is a time when a man lords it over others to their hurt.* (vs. 9)
- Wicked people are honored while they live and then praised after they die - *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.* (vs. 10)
- Wicked people commit crimes and go on to live long, prosperous lives - *...a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time...* (vs. 12)

From the perspective of the moment, it seems like wickedness pays off. As Solomon watches these cars whiz by, and the wicked are in them are having no regard for God it seems like sin is paying off for them. But then Solomon looks a little further down the road and sees the bridge is out and they're rushing towards disaster.

*<sup>12</sup> Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time...<sup>13</sup> Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.*

Literally, they may live a long life but they won't live a long life. From one perspective they live a long life, but from another perspective, they don't. Wisdom and foolishness are a matter of perspective. Prov. 22:3 says *the prudent (wise) see danger and take refuge, but the simple (fool) keep going and pay the penalty.*

God wants to help us have a peak perspective of life, to see the big picture, not just the immediate situation in front of us. We can't know what the future holds, we can't always figure out what God is doing or why He's doing it. But faith recognizes that God is at work in our lives and knows that while things may be rough or confusing or downright scary in the moment, in the wide angle view of life, God loves us and is working all

things out for our good.

And when we come to crossroads in life; decisions and choices about what we're going to believe and what we're going to do and how we're going to live, the fear of God leads us to not choose the path marked "easiest" or "what I want" or "what the crowd is doing", instead the fear of God guides us to choose the road marked, "obeys God and honors His name".

As I thought about this though, I realized that most of the crossroads that we face on any given day aren't life or death, make it or break it type choices, they are the small, seemingly insignificant choices that affect our trajectory in little ways that accumulate into big ways. You and I are more a product of the many small choices we make every day than the occasional large choices in our lives. So let's drop this into the context of our everyday life.

*<sup>15</sup> So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun. 8:15*

One of the choices we have every day is to fear God by treasuring the little things that God has blessed us with. Instead of living to get more and more, we thank God for the little things that we can take for granted. We live in an awareness of His tender mercies to us every day. Now turn with me to chapter 9, and let's pick it up in verse 3:

*<sup>3</sup> This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. <sup>4</sup> Anyone who is among the living has hope<sup>[b]</sup>—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!*

*<sup>5</sup> For the living know that they will die,  
but the dead know nothing;  
they have no further reward,  
and even their name is forgotten.*

*<sup>6</sup> Their love, their hate*

*and their jealousy have long since vanished;  
never again will they have a part  
in anything that happens under the sun.*

There's a lot in these verses, but I think the big thing Solomon is saying here is that if you're going to do anything with your life, you need to do it while you're alive. As long as there is life there is hope, but when we die anything we hoped to accomplish or achieve dies with us. A live dog is able to do more than a dead lion. Once we're gone, the sober truth is that our footprint on this earth and whatever we hope to accomplish in life is set in stone - too late to change it, too late to add to it, too late to take away from it. In Christ we know we have been forgiven of all our sins, but the truth remains that if we live our lives foolishly, then when we come to the end of our lives we will look back with deep regrets. But as long as there's life, there's potential to change that, to make wise choices, to live wisely by living in the fear of the Lord:

*<sup>7</sup> Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. <sup>8</sup> Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. <sup>9</sup> Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. <sup>10</sup> Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.*

Don't waste your life - the time to live it wisely, to live it in the fear of the Lord, is today. Enjoy the little moments of life and live them for God's glory. Don't wait for the big moments to obey God, obey Him in the smallest of moments. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with passion! Paul shares a similar thought in Col. 3:17 when he writes, *And **whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.***"

This isn't saying, "do the big things for God's glory", they are saying do the little things - the "whatever your hand finds to do" things - for the glory of God and in the fear of God. Enjoy life, love your spouse, care for your

kids, help your neighbor, be a good friend, do your work with diligence, live every minute, especially the smallest moments, in the fear of the Lord.

We know something far greater than Solomon knew: we know of Christ's redeeming love and the hope of the resurrection. So we don't live in the shadow of impending death, but the hope of impending life. Sin collapsed the bridge of humanity so that we were all rushing headlong to destruction, but Christ has provided an exit ramp, a way to God and eternal life by faith in him. May that knowledge stir our hearts to redeem every minute for the glory of the name of Jesus.

As we close in prayer, let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart about ways that maybe you aren't walking in the fear of the Lord. Ways you aren't being kind to your wife, or husband. Ways you aren't loving your kids or caring for them well. Ways that you are not glorifying God in your job. Or friendships. Or in the words you speak. Confess it to Christ, ask him to forgive you, and to change you. He is eager to empower us to live our lives in such a way that he gets glory. He wants to help us live every minute of our lives in the fear of the Lord.