

## Wisdom for Tyrants and Rebels *(which covers just about everyone...)* – Eccles 8:2-15

**Introduction** – We have seen how difficult it is to understand the end of God’s ways. We have seen how difficult it is to understand ourselves and men and women around us in community. We have seen how bent man really is (7:29). Now we will also see how difficult it is for man to govern man and for men to be governed by other imperfect, fallen men. And yet, this is also what God has given us.

**Wisdom for Those Who Would Counsel Rulers** (vv2-7) – In general, Solomon exhorts a faithful submission to those in civil authority. Paul calls these kings “*God’s ministers*” (Rom 13:1-7) and he is not speaking only of godly rulers. In Titus 3:1-3, Paul plainly exhorts the church to the duty of deference, obedience, and submission even towards those who are anything but godly (esp. 3:3). This is Solomon’s assumption – “*There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt*” (Eccles 8:9).

**Keep Your Oath** (v2) – The first reason to submit to your authorities is out of a matter of conscience. This begins with children “*obey your parents in the Lord.*” There are no absolute authorities and there are times we must disobey. But for the most part, kings, governors, elders, parents, and other authorities are to be obeyed, even when you disagree and even when they are wicked.

**Don’t Fall on Your Sword over Everything** (v3-4) – We are exhorted to pick our battles carefully. Wisdom does not require a list to know each specific action; rather wisdom gives a discerning spirit regarding timing, relevance, and potential fallout. In addition, responding to imperfect authority requires wisdom; grudging obedience must be replaced with cheerful compliance (v3a). We are to learn to restrain our backchat (v4), and not out of cowardice or compromise, but out of prudence.

**Practicality and Discernment** (vv5-6) – The second reason to submit to your authorities is that it will then go well with you (v5a, also Eph 6:1-3). Obviously, things can go awful for those under the authority of a wicked or foolish tyrant, but Solomon means ultimately before God, your obedience will be rewarded. We must learn godly patience and not fall to a fleshly expediency, even when misery is all around (v6). The slow, patient work of William Wilberforce comes to mind as a godly example.

**Neither You nor the King Know Everything** (v7) – Both the one tempted to tyranny and the one tempted to rebellion need to remember that God is inscrutable in His ways and we never know for sure what will be the ramifications of certain actions. This calls all parties, rulers and subjects, to a godly humility.

**The Limitations of Rulers** (vv8-10) – The civil government cannot predestine safety for everyone in every situation, no matter how much they tax us. The king and his subjects are both at war with death, and all will eventually lose the battle (v8). They cannot pass a bill outlawing death, and they should learn from this that they cannot legislate wickedness out of existence. In fact, there are many areas that the wise ruler learns to say, “I have no earthly idea what to do about this problem and it is not within my power or within my authority to do anything about it.” The modern state is not the savior of mankind.

Because of these limitations, well-intentioned and wicked rulers both can mistakenly “rule to their own hurt” (v9). Human rulers must remember that they are just human rulers, and they will be forgotten (v10).

**Fear God and Trust in Him** (vv11-14) – We are to submit to our rulers and yet Solomon warns us that we cannot trust them as gods/saviors because we are to be aware of their limitations and corruption. We should see the ineptness of civil government (especially wicked governments) and as Christians, we should not fall to paranoia.

**God-given Deterrence** (v11) – The sword is given to the civil authority and when justice is executed speedily, wickedness is curtailed. Here we are reminded that the civil magistrate is given authority to *restrain* the wicked, but he is not told to *redeem* or *reform* the wicked – he cannot.

**Kings Cannot be Omniscient** (v12) – At the same time, we cannot depend on the civil government to rightly punish every infraction of God’s law in every situation. A faithful Christian conscience built into a society will rest in the knowledge of the Final Judgment Day when God and His people will be fully vindicated (1 Cor 4:5, Rom 12:17-19). The wicked will be recompensed at that day (v13, see also Eccl 12:14) although in this day, the wicked often get away with it (v14) – and this is vanity under the sun.

**In the Teeth of Wickedness** (v15) – And here is the sum of the matter, both of this chapter, this section (chapters 6-8) and the book thus far: In the midst of the inscrutable mist of the ways of Providence what are we to do? What should we do when it looks like the wicked got away with it again? Our flesh would lead us to despair, to panic, to tyranny or rebellion, to panic and to deep and abiding anger. But the Spirit gives something else – “*So I commended enjoyment....*” And then He gives us a three point application: 1) *eat*, 2) *drink*, and 3) *be merry*. And this enjoyment that passes understanding will “*remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God give him under the sun.*”