

## Wisdom in a Messy World – *Eccles 7:15-8:1*

**Introduction** – We are learning about God and the world He has ordained. But this book is not presenting us with a list of catechism-type questions and answers. The pursuit of wisdom doesn't seem to go in that direction. One writer calls this section “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” We are being taught to fear a God who is not tame, who cannot be controlled or manipulated, whose ways are often unexplainable in the mist of this vain world.

But why are we being taught this? The first section taught us that satisfaction cannot be obtained within autonomous man (1:1-2:26). The second section taught us that God is exhaustively over everything and that it is all beautiful in His time. While we cannot figure it all out, He does grant, like faith itself, the power to rest and enjoy His inscrutable ways (3:1-5:20). This third section is pressing us towards a life of deep joy and reverent fear in a God we cannot control and a life that He freely gives for His own good purposes (8:15). We'll end this subsection finding that when wisdom is acquired, even in this messy world, it makes the face shine and removes the sternness of one's face; it helps us lighten up a little.

**A God Who Is Not Tame** (vv15-18) – We need to repent of our shallow, pop-theology that acts as though we have God's ways all figured out (Is 55:9). Against Job, his foolish friends argued that he must not be righteous or else God would have granted him a better life-situation (Job 4:7-8). This is immature and foolish theology. In the inscrutable plans of God, a righteous man may perish and a wicked man may find his life prolonged under the sun (v15). Therefore, we must not treat our obedience as placing God in some kind of debt toward us. This is a kind of false-piety pursued to extract a reward. Jesus taught us that even our faithfulness merits no reward, for we are simply God's servants by mercy (Luke 17:5-10). This is the error of being (or thinking of oneself as) “overly righteous” (v16). At the same time, the one who genuinely fears God does not foolishly conclude that his manner of living does not matter (v17). The answer is not a pagan moderation, a half-heartedness in the matters of good and evil, but rather a sincere fear of God (v18). “*God cannot be manipulated by our behavior. He is not to be coddled or possessed or used. He is to be feared. Solomon presents wisdom as fearing God (also Prov 1:7). God is not safe. He is not manageable. His ways are not your ways, his thoughts not your thoughts. He does not follow your rationalizations*” – Meyers. Here is the matter of faith and enjoyment: Not only are God's ways higher than ours, they are better. They are to be received with thankfulness, patience, reverence, and expectation. Walking in this wisdom, we become a people who fear God and escape foolishness (v18c).

**Another Kind of Overly Righteous** (vv19-22) – Wisdom lies not in our ability to always figure things out, but in realizing that some riddles cannot be solved by us, and sometimes this includes figuring out one another. Not only God, but men and women, made in the image of God, and now fallen, are also inscrutable (see also 8:16-17). Knowing this strengthens the wise man and makes him a good servant-leader (v19). He finds himself a little less shocked with others' (and his own) faults.

**Righteous Ones** (v20) – Everyone sins, even those whom the Bible calls “righteous.”

**So Cut a Little Slack** (vv21-22) – If we seek to be wise, we must not pay too much attention to the criticisms of others. You may have a subordinate who curses you, but you know that he or she does not really understand the situation. But remember how many times you have been guilty of the same sin towards those who have been in a position of authority over you? Pastors, parents, spouses, teachers, bosses, governors of all kinds, fall short and do so often. And so do those who are under authority. This is why we must let love cover a *multitude of sins* (1 Pet 4:8). Before we run off with our finger-waving, we must be careful to consider our own state (Gal 6:1-2). Here is wisdom: Not everything “sinful” is all that bad. Not everyone “righteous” is all that good.

**Looking for Wisdom in All the Wrong Places** (vv23-28) – Extraordinary wisdom had been given to Solomon on these matters, and yet this wisdom teaches him how little deep wisdom he has (vv23-25).

**Sexual Folly** (v26) – An immoral woman knows how to get her prey. Like a wise hunter who understand his prey, so this woman knows how to lead the fool into a trap; thinking he is finding ultimate pleasure, ultimate freedom, he finds himself caught in the cords of his own sin (i.e. Prov 5:20-23).

**The Immoral Woman and the Foolish Woman** (vv25-26) – But I think Solomon is getting after something bigger than the particular sin of sexual immorality. Much like the interplay between the Immoral Woman and the Foolish Woman of Proverbs 1-9, these are the opposite of the Virtuous Woman (Proverbs 31) who is also likened to Lady Wisdom (i.e. Prov 1:20ff). Sexual immorality is a great sin, but it is also a powerful picture to us of the seduction and destruction of folly.

**I Cannot Understand Them** (vv27-29) – Try inserting “understand” for the word “found” here and see if these verses make more sense in the context of the argument. No matter how hard you try, people cannot be thoroughly searched out or understood. Fallen human beings are beyond our abilities to completely know. Wisdom understands this and gives a sigh of relief.... Solomon can only find one in a thousand men he consistently understands, and when he turns to the opposite sex, it's hopeless. We are all bent, crooked, marred, and inscrutable.

**The Conclusion of the Matter** (v8:1) – The person who is wise and begins to grasp these things relaxes a little. He lets go of trying to control or understand everyone around him. A shine comes to his face when we are humbled this way, when we fear God, when we rest in Him alone – for life and joy and every good thing in our vain little lives.