

Religion and Politics

Ecclesiastes Part 10

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9:1 2-23-14

Summary: Obey human authorities like you would obey God – even abusive authorities. Don't be intimidated by them, don't push a lost cause, and know your limitations, and things will go well for you. Yes, authorities have been affected by the curse so that there is abusive authority and injustice. But the retribution principle still stands. So just obey, be wise, and enjoy life!

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8:1 Who is like the wise person, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed. **2** Keep the king's command because of your oath made before God. **3** Do not be in a hurry; leave his presence, and don't persist in a bad cause, since he will do whatever he wants. **4** For the king's word is authoritative, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?" **5** The one who keeps a command will not experience anything harmful, and a wise heart knows the right time and procedure. **6** For every activity there is a right time and procedure, even though man's troubles are heavy on him. **7** Yet no one knows what will happen because who can tell him what will happen? **8** No one has authority over the wind to restrain it, and there is no authority over the day of death; there is no furlough in battle, and wickedness will not allow those who practice it to escape. **9** All this I have seen, applying my mind to all the work that is done under the sun, at a time when one man has authority over another to his harm. **10** In such circumstances, I saw the wicked buried. They came and went from the holy place, and they were praised in the city where they did so. This too is futile. **11** Because the sentence against a criminal act is not carried out quickly, the heart of people is filled with the desire to commit crime. **12** Although a sinner commits crime a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I also know that it will go well with God-fearing people, for they are reverent before Him. **13** However, it will not go well with the wicked, and they will not lengthen their days like a shadow, for they are not reverent before God. **14** There is a futility that is done on the earth: there are righteous people who get what the actions of the wicked deserve, and there are wicked people who get what the actions of the righteous deserve. I say that this too is futile. **15** So I commended enjoyment because there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat, drink, and enjoy himself, for this will accompany him in his labor during the days of his life that God gives him under the sun. **16** When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the activity that is done on the earth (even though one's eyes do not close in sleep day or night), **17** I observed all the work of God and concluded that man is unable to discover the work that is done under the sun. Even though a man labors hard to

explore it, he cannot find it; even if the wise man claims to know it, he is unable to discover it. 9:1 Indeed, I took all this to heart and explained it all: the righteous, the wise, and their works are in God's hands. People don't know whether to expect love or hate. Everything lies ahead of them.

Introduction: Don't Chafe Against the Curse

What are the two things they say you should never talk about in polite company? Religion and politics. I hope there isn't any polite company here today because after dealing with some other things for a few weeks we are returning now to our verse by verse study through the book of Ecclesiastes, and the entire section we hit today is all about both religion and politics. Ecclesiastes is about enjoying life in a futile world by pleasing God. And if we are going to learn how to enjoy life in a fallen, cursed, futile world, we are going to have to know how to deal with politics and government and authorities because that is a big part of life in a fallen world.

I was talking to Stephanie Truong not long ago and I really like the way she put it. She pointed out that so often we miss out on the joy we should have because we are "chafing against the curse." You want to express love to someone with an encouraging phone call and your phone battery dies. You want to serve the saints of God in an important ministry at church but you end up spending two hours in a traffic jam so you can serve for 15 minutes. You plan a wonderful time alone with God in prayer and Scripture, but your alarm malfunctions and it is all you can do just to get to work on time. You plan to spend time together with your wife, but then your boss keeps you late. We have these big, important, eternal things we are trying to do, like expressing love to people, or doing ministry, or worshipping God. But we find ourselves frustrated because things like phone batteries and alarm clocks and traffic jams gobble up our time. But one of the things we are learning in this book is that all those troublesome aspects of living in a fallen, cursed, futile world are actually from God's hand. He sends them, which means dealing with those things is part of our God-given task. If getting my phone charged is part of loving my neighbor, and sitting in traffic is part of serving the body of Christ, then dealing with the phone and sitting in traffic are big, important, eternal things. If God says I have to deal with those things in order to accomplish my task, then dealing with those things is just as sacred an activity as anything else.

It is crucial that we understand all that if we are going to enjoy life like God calls us to enjoy it, because fixing things that break and looking for things that are lost and washing things that keep getting dirty and dealing with things that go wrong takes up so much of our lives. If those things are trivial, then our lives are trivial. But they aren't. They are God-given aspects of our calling, and so we don't have to know what role they play or what the purpose is each time – all we have to do is trust the God who ordains them. So don't chafe against the curse. When we expect life not to be cursed, we end up beating our head against the wall of the curse, because it doesn't go away just because we think it should. But if we just accept the fallenness of this world as part of God's perfect plan, and along the way, enjoy what is available to be enjoyed in life by pleasing God, then we will have a God-glorifying joy.

Wisdom Needed

But in order to do that, you are going to need to know how to deal with the curse, and that requires wisdom. So this whole middle portion of the book is devoted to teaching us one wisdom principle after another.

8:1 Who is like the wise person, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed.

Wisdom is crucial for joy. And the wisdom lesson in today's passage has to do with authority – especially government authority. So today I will be preaching about politics, but don't think for a minute that this is an unspiritual topic, or a sub-Christian topic. Learning how to live wisely in the midst of the

course is crucial for living the Christian life. So let me ask you this – do you think the curse had any effect on human government? Or do you look at the United States government and say, “That’s pretty much exactly what I expect heaven to be like”? When I say that human government is fallen and broken, that statement might be in the running for the all-time least controversial statement I have ever made. The easiest thing in the world is finding something wrong with the government. So if government is affected by the fall, then we must learn the proper way to deal with it if we are going to live wisely. And these principles we will learn today apply not just to a king, but to all the authorities in our lives. Ladies, this will help you in your marriage in dealing with your husband’s authority in the home. These principles apply to teachers at school or in Sunday school for kids, your boss at work, the police, elders in the church, people in charge of whatever organization you happen to become a part of – all human authorities.

Obey Like You Obey God

So the first principle he has for us is very simple. If you want to be wise in dealing with fallen, depraved human authority, obey it.

2 Keep the king's command

Obey the one who is in charge. If you are in an organization, and that organization has rules, follow the rules. If the government passes a law, obey the law. Be obedient and submissive to authority. The phrase translated **because of** in verse 2 can also mean **in the manner of**.¹ I think that is the meaning here.

2 Keep the king's command in the manner of an oath made before God.

Obey human authorities in the same manner as you would keep an oath that you swore to God Himself. If you swore an oath to God, would you take that seriously? That is how serious you should be about obeying those God has placed in authority over you. If that sounds extreme to you, you should know that this is not the only place in the Bible that says this.

Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted ... 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

It is not extreme to say that we should submit to human authorities as if we were submitting to God Himself because in doing so we *are* submitting to God Himself. All authority is God’s authority. The only reason we submit to any human authority is because of our desire to submit to God. And that principle applies to secular, human government, and it applies to the marriage relationship.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

It also applies to parental authority.

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents as you would the Lord, because this is right.

When to Disobey

So we obey human authorities because God is the one who placed us under those authorities. Now, is that authority absolute? No. There is one instance when we are not to obey them. If they command us to do something that would be sin, at that point we must not follow their command. If the whole point is to

¹ e.g. Ps.110:4.

obey God, then obviously we cannot go along when a human authority requires us to sin against God. When the authorities told the Apostles that they had to stop preaching the gospel . . .

Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

So that is the one exception, but other than that, we obey them with the same seriousness we would have if we had sworn an oath to God. Swearing an oath is like if you say, "May God strike me dead if I do not follow through on this." Obeying human authority is a very serious matter to God.

Even Abusive Authority

"But what if it's abusive authority? Then what?"

Do you think Solomon was aware when he wrote this that sometimes human authorities are abusive? Yes, he was.

9 ...one man has authority over another to his harm.

Even when the one in charge is doing things that are harmful to you, this still applies. You still obey. There is no exemption for bad authorities. If there were, then there would be no authority because all people who are in authority do bad things. Every parent sometimes makes decisions that are not really what is best for their kids. Every husband, every governor, every lawmaker, every pastor – there are no perfect authorities in this world. Some are more abusive than others, but all of us who are in authority are abusive to some degree. And yet we are told to submit to authorities as to the Lord Himself. Why? Because whatever abusive thing the authority is doing, God is behind that accomplishing something that is wonderfully good. When King Rehoboam was abusive to the people and took pride in oppressing the people to the point where it split Israel in two, right after describing that 1 Kings 12:15 says **this turn of events was from the LORD**. Behind every abusive act that a human authority carries out, God is doing something good. And the good that He is doing is greater than the evil they are doing. And so we gladly submit.

However, that is not the end of the story. We submit, but we need to be wise about how we submit. Sometimes there is a wise way and a foolish way to submit. So he is going to give us a few more principles here.

Don't Be Intimidated

3 Do not be in a hurry; leave his presence

I think a more accurate translation would be **Don't leave his presence terrified**.² This same phrase is used in Genesis 45:3 when Joseph's brothers were so intimidated by Joseph that they were paralyzed in fear.

Genesis 45:3 ... they could not answer him because they were terrified in his presence.

So what he is saying is this: Do not get so intimidated by the one in authority that you can't function. Honor him, respect him, obey him, but realize he's just a man." If you get so you are so afraid of him that you cannot even function because you are worried you will do something wrong, that means you are holding the one in authority way too high in your heart. That kind of fear comes from a lack of trust in God. If you are trying to obey the best you can, and you have a clear conscience before God, then you have nothing to be afraid of. So don't lose any sleep over the possibility that the authority might be unhappy with you.

² The word in the Hebrew is terrified. Some feel that it makes better sense to make some minor adjustments to the vowels so that it says "**hurry**" instead of "**terrified**." But I am not comfortable changing the vowels in this case. I think it is best to just take it as it stands – **Do not leave his presence terrified or stupefied**. Job 23:15 and Gn.45:3 are both examples of where this word is used of being paralyzed with fear before a superior. The idea is of being intimidated to the point of paralysis.

“But I could lose my job!”

So what? If you do your best to obey your boss and be a profitable employee for him, and you do what is pleasing in God’s sight, and you still get fired, doesn’t that mean that God does not want you to have that job anymore? And you don’t want any part of a job that God doesn’t want you to have, right? So relax. No human authority can disrupt God’s perfect plan for you. So do not be intimidated, but do be smart.

Don’t Push a Lost Cause

3 ... and don't persist in a bad cause, since he will do whatever he wants.

If the person in authority is dead set against something, and it is clear he is not going to change his mind – don’t push it. Don’t waste your influence pushing a lost cause. Be careful how you “spend your nickel.” You have a certain amount of influence with the person in authority over you, and it is foolish to blow that on something that has no chance of success.

And I think one of the hardest places to apply this principle is in marriage. It is so easy for a wife to focus only on the one-flesh relationship, but forget about the authority and submission part, so she ends up pushing for her point of view on every single issue – big or small. And even those areas where she knows her husband isn’t going to budge, she is tempted to argue anyway. But the woman with wisdom will know when to speak and when not to – and when to use her influence and when to save it.

We need to remember that our authorities are not answerable to us.

4 For the king's word is authoritative, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

The power rests in his hands. And that is God-given power, so don’t fight it. Your life will go much more smoothly if you just submit to authority.

It Goes Well for the Obedient, but Obey Wisely

5 The one who keeps a command will not experience anything harmful

All that power that the authority has – that can be to your advantage. If you are loyal and obedient and respectful so that you have a good relationship with the one in charge, not only will you escape his wrath, but you will also benefit from his favor. Take advantage of the favor of those in authority over you when it is available. Do not put your trust in that, but do use it for your advantage as you carry out your task in this life. You should be a good employee just out of conscience, but doing that has its fringe benefits. You get the favor of the one who has all the power, and that can come in handy.

So obey, but be wise in how you obey.

5 ... a wise heart knows the right time and procedure. 6 For every activity there is a right time and procedure

Lit. **the right time and judgment.**

When you obey and you do what you are told, there is very often a wise way and a foolish way to do it. Submission to authority is not mindlessness. It is not you just shutting off your brain and following commands like a robot.

Luke 19:12 A nobleman traveled to a far country ... 13 He called 10 of his slaves, gave them 10 minas, and told them, ‘Engage in business until I come back.’

A mina was 3.5 year’s wages. So he gives each of these slaves something like \$100,000 to watch over, and he gives a very simple command: **Engage in business.** Three slaves are each given the exact same task. But when the nobleman came back he did not just evaluate *whether* they obeyed his command. He was mostly concerned with *how wisely* they did so. The one who got the highest return on that money received the highest praise.

When the one in authority tells you to do something, do it. But don't do it mindlessly. Do not think that just because you are not the decision maker that your knowledge and intelligence and skill are put on the shelf. There is much, much more to wisdom than just decision making. Utilize all your knowledge and skill and experience and gifts and do it in a wise, profitable way.

Know Your Limitations

But when you do that – when you exercise all this wisdom, keep in mind your limitations. In the rest of the paragraph he gives us some other things that the wise heart knows. Not only do you know that there is a time and judgment for everything, but also...

6 ... man's troubles are heavy on him. 7 And no one knows what will happen because who can tell him what will happen?

If you are truly wise, then you are wise enough to know that your wisdom is limited. All the wisdom in the world cannot exempt you from the troubles of mankind that weigh heavy on us. And all the wisdom in the future will not enable you to see the future. Nor will it enable you to control the creation.

8 No one has authority over the wind to restrain it

You cannot control the creation, nor can you control your own lifespan.

8 ... and there is no authority over the day of death; there is no furlough in battle

When it is your time to die in battle, you are not going to be able to get out of it. You can be a world-class athlete in your 20's and get a brain tumor and die in a matter of weeks. When God says it is your time, it is your time. And nothing can rescue you from it – certainly not sin. The most literal translation of the end of verse 8 is **wickedness will not deliver those who practice it**. Very often when people don't like God's plan for their life they try to escape it through some sin. They run to sin as a refuge from God's painful plan. But it doesn't work. Sin does not deliver you from anything.

So be wise in the way you carry out the wishes of the one in authority over you, but don't get too puffed up about your level of wisdom. Keep your limitations firmly in mind. Maybe you know a lot more than your boss, or your husband, or politicians, but the reality is, even with all your amazing knowledge, you cannot escape God's plan, you cannot escape the prescribed day of your death, you cannot control the creation, you cannot see the future, and you cannot even escape the normal trials and troubles of mankind. All of that should help us with some perspective when we start getting really impressed with how wise we are.

Problems With Authority

Ok, so the chapter begins by calling us to submit to authority – followed by some instructions about how to submit. That is the first eight verses. Now, starting in verse 9, the Preacher brings up some problems with authority. That always happens in this book – he is always brutally honest about the reality of the curse. His conclusion in every single section is that we are to enjoy life as a gift from God, but he knows that that message will be empty if he does not face up to the problems of this life that seem to threaten our ability to enjoy life. So today he says, "Part of enjoying life means submitting to authority," but he wants us to know he is not naïve about the problems in government.

Abusive Authority

9 All this I have seen, applying my mind to all the work that is done under the sun, at a time when one man has authority over another to his harm.

Very often those in authority are abusive. And yet, they still end up being honored.

10 In such circumstances, I saw the wicked buried. They came and went from the holy place, and they were praised in the city where they did so. This too is futile.

Right in the very city where he behaved wickedly, after he dies he is praised. They whitewash his memory and end up naming a holiday after him. And this is especially true when the wickedness has to do with failure to punish crime. If someone is brutal and abusive, people remember that. But if the wickedness of a leader is the wickedness of being too soft on crime – very often he is elevated as a man of compassion, even though his leniency has a devastating effect on society.

Injustice

11 Because the sentence against a criminal act is not carried out quickly, the heart of people is filled with the desire to commit crime.

I don't know if there has ever been a society more slow to justice than ours. A person commits multiple murders, there is no question at all that he did it, and 20 years later that person is still alive. If you murder someone in this country, you might not get caught, and even if you do get caught, you might not get convicted. And if you do get convicted, you probably won't get the death penalty. And if you do get the death penalty, it for sure won't be carried out for a very long time, if ever. Every year in our country there are 13,000 murders and about 40 executions. That means 99.7% of all murderers are never executed.

Genesis 9:6 Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His image.

Murder is to be punished with nothing less than the death penalty because the image of God is so sacred. But our culture does not care about the image of God, and so we don't execute murderers.

And what is the result? Another 13,000 more innocent people get to be murdered this year. And another 13,000 families have to go through the horror of losing a loved one that way, because murderers aren't afraid. When people debate the death penalty, the debate always comes around to the question of whether the death penalty serves as a deterrent. Some people say, "Look, murder is usually a crime of passion. People aren't thinking things through when they commit murder. So it doesn't matter what the consequences are – it won't stop them from murdering because they aren't thinking about that at the time."

The other side says, "We don't agree. We think it does prevent some murders."

I am not here to propagate any particular political agenda or belief. However, whenever there is a political issue that is directly addressed in the Bible, then I don't hesitate to preach it, because it's the Word of God. That is why I don't hesitate to preach against abortion or homosexual behavior as being sins. And in the same way, I don't hesitate to preach about whether swift, certain, and strong punishment acts as a deterrent to crime, because this verse is very clear that it does.

11 Because the sentence against a criminal act is not carried out quickly, the heart of people is filled with the desire to commit crime.

That is about as clear as it can be. If you are a government official, and you have a hand in causing justice to move slowly so that punishments for crime are not certain, swift, and severe, then you are guilty of causing more crime. In our country we have a doctrine that says a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Why? Because we so hate the idea of an innocent person being unjustly punished that we would rather see ten guilty people go free than see one innocent person be unjustly punished. Punishing the innocent, in our culture, is considered really, really evil. But acquitting the guilty – that's not nearly as bad. Is that the standard we see in Scripture? No.

Proverbs 17:15 Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent-- the LORD detests them both.

Does God hate it when an innocent man is punished? Yes. But He hates it just as much when a guilty criminal goes free.

People will argue: “Punishing the innocent is inhumane. But letting a guilty person go free, that might be a little miscarriage of justice, but it’s not inhumane.”

Tell that to that criminal’s future victims. When that rapist, who should have never gone free, goes and rapes some woman, go tell that woman about how humane it was to let that man go free. And tell it to ten other women who are raped because rapists in our culture are not afraid of consequences because justice is so rarely done. Letting the guilty go free is every bit as inhumane as punishing an innocent person, because where punishment is not certain and swift, you encourage more crime.

The world will tell you that there is just a tiny percentage of people who are criminals, mostly because of some mental disease or defect, or a genetic problem. And they are pretty much pre-programmed to behave that way, regardless of laws or law enforcement or threats of punishment. But most people are basically good, and would never commit a crime even if there were no police or locks on doors or any deterrent. But that theory runs aground every time there is a riot. When the Broncos won the Superbowl in 1998, people celebrated by destroying cars, smashing into stores and taking whatever they wanted. When there are riots, people destroy things for no reason, beat people for no reason – even kill people. In 1985, soccer fans in Brussels rioted and killed 39 people. Why? What horrific stress drives people to this extreme behavior? Finding out that their team won a game?

How do you explain that? It is easy to explain. Thousands of people are celebrating, and suddenly start to realize that the police are outnumbered, and the restraints come off and we all get to see what is really in their hearts. The behavior you see in a riot is a window into the human heart. That is what is in there. Most of the time it is restrained because of the government. That is why God gave us the wonderful gift of government. Even a terrible government is far better than anarchy, because there is so much evil in the human heart that needs to be restrained. People do the things they do in a riot because they have no real threat of being punished and Solomon says **their heart is filled with desire to commit crime**.

So the writer of Ecclesiastes just puts it all right out there on the table. Yes, I admit there are real problems with government and those in authority. They are often abusive, and injustice is very often rampant. Those with the power to protect the weak from the strong often fail to do so. And yet these evil leaders end up being praised and honored in the very places they did their evil. Criminals go free. So much injustice. So what are we to make of all that? Is this world just spinning out of control? No.

The Retribution Principle

12 Although a sinner commits crime a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I also know that it will go well with God-fearing people, for they are reverent before Him. 13 However, it will not go well with the wicked, and they will not lengthen their days like a shadow, for they are not reverent before God.

The point there is that the exceptions are just that – exceptions. If you are going to enjoy life with God in a fallen, cursed, futile world, you need to realize that yes, there is some temporary injustice that takes place, but that does not cancel out the principle that is expressed so often in Scripture that as a rule, God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. Theologians refer to this as the retribution principle.

Proverbs 13:15 the way of the unfaithful is hard.

Deuteronomy 5:33 Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days

That is the retribution principle, and it is most definitely valid. But it is a *principle*, not a *law*. It is *generally* the way things go, but there are exceptions. For example, Job. Job is an example of a righteous man who got trouble instead of reward. The error of Job’s friends was they thought the retribution principle was a law, with no exceptions. They said, “Job, it always goes well with the righteous and always goes hard for the wicked therefore you must be guilty of wickedness.” One of the main purposes

of that book is to teach us that that is not true. It *generally* goes better for the righteous and worse for the wicked, but not *always*. And so here Job and Solomon are pointing out two sides of the same coin. The book of Job says, “Yes, the retribution principle is true – *but there are exceptions!*” And Solomon is saying, “Yes, there are exceptions – *but the retribution principle is still true!* I don’t care if someone commits 100 crimes and still lives long and seems to prosper – I’m telling you the retribution principle still stands.”

But how? How can it still be true when I see so many exceptions all around me? Solomon does not give the answer. Here he just states it. You don’t need to see it. You do not need to always understand what God is doing and how it is ultimately good and just. All you have to know is that He can be trusted. If you try to figure out how everything He is doing is ultimately just, you will be chasing the wind. You cannot ever figure all that out. Just trust Him. And do not be surprised when the curse rears its ugly head.

14 There is a futility that is done on the earth: (By now we understand that when the writer of Ecclesiastes calls something futile, it is a reference to the curse.) **there are righteous people who get what the actions of the wicked deserve, and there are wicked people who get what the actions of the righteous deserve. I say that this too is futile.**

The only thing we need to explain injustice in this world is the fall and the curse. That is why injustice exists. But ultimately God makes everything right, so we don’t have to try to gain control of it. We can just trust Him that He is in control and He knows what He is doing.

So where does that leave us? We are living in the middle of this fallen, cursed, futile situation where there is a lot of oppressive, abusive authority and injustice and crime. God has a handle on it all, but we don’t. So what are we supposed to do in the middle of this mess? Can anyone guess what the answer is going to be? It is the same answer he gives in every single section of the book.

Enjoy Life!

15 So I commended enjoyment because there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat, drink, and enjoy himself, for this will accompany him in his labor during the days of his life that God gives him under the sun.

Enjoy life as a gift from God! You cannot fix the government, you cannot fix the world – but let’s talk about something you can fix: dinner. Maybe you don’t have the power to reform the health care system, or fix the justice system, or straighten out the tax code, but you do have the power to put just the right amount of butter and sour cream on your baked potato – so do that, and enjoy it as a gift from God. If you see injustice in the world, when it is in your power to bring about justice, then by all means, do it. But when it is out of your hands, then just submit to authority, and enjoy a nice plate of shrimp scampi. Maybe you cannot prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, but you can put a rack of ribs on your grill and make some garlic mashed potatoes.

Don’t Spoil It By Trying To Figure Out God

There is so much to be enjoyed in life – a lot of wonderful little gifts God has planted in your life and enabled you to enjoy, so enjoy them! And do not spoil that enjoyment by spending your energy trying to figure out what God has not revealed.

16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the activity that is done on the earth (even though one's eyes do not close in sleep day or night), 17 I observed all the work of God and concluded that man is unable to discover the work that is done under the sun. Even though a man labors hard to explore it, he cannot find it; even if the wise man claims to know it, he is unable to discover it. 9:1 Indeed, I took all this to heart and explained it all: the righteous, the wise, and their works are in God's hands. People don't know whether to expect love or hate. Everything lies ahead of them.

When God does something or thinks something or plans something or feels something, it is impossible for us to know about it unless He reveals it to us. It is impossible to figure out anything about God that has not been revealed. People ask, "When do you think Jesus is coming back?" I have no idea. I am not concerned about times and dates that haven't been revealed. Why? Because I am too busy trying to figure out if ranch or poppy seed dressing will taste best on my salad. The mind of an eternal, invisible, infinite God is a little out of my range. I exist in a much smaller realm. First let me figure out how to make myself get out of bed at the time I'm supposed to get out of bed each morning, and then I'll start working on figuring out all the mysteries of the universe and discerning the infinite mind of God.

Don't chafe against the curse. Submit to the authorities in your life as wisely as you can. And along the way, enjoy what God has made enjoyable. What do you like? Chinese? Mexican? Thai? Lobster? Nachos? Waffles? Prime rib? Have some! And have something good to drink besides just water. Do not spend more than you can afford on food, and don't overeat, but within reason, enjoy sitting down with some great food with some people you love, recognize it all as gestures of God's love for you, let your heart swell with gratitude and just have a great time.

Conclusion

Why is it that people have such a problem with submitting to authority? Isn't it because of fear that obeying will threaten their happiness? If your boss tells you to do something that you think will make you happy, no one has a problem obeying that. I chafe under authority when I am afraid that them being in control of aspects of my life might put a dent in my happiness (or take it away altogether). So the Preacher reminds us yet again – enjoyment is not in the hands of the people who have power to push your life one way or another. Happiness is not in the hands of those who have the power to give you things or take things away. What happens if the wrong person or party gets elected? Prices will go up? Taxes will go up? Unemployment will increase? Or maybe the environment will get ruined? Education will decline? We'll end up at war? Do those things matter? Sure. Is your happiness dependent on them? No. What happens if your husband does something different from what you think is best? Or if the leadership at church makes some decisions you don't agree with? Does that have the power to cut you off from enjoyment of life? No. Those are aspects of the curse, and they are hard, but God has still granted you access to enjoyment of countless gifts in life, and the enjoyment is there for the taking as long as you fear God and use wisdom to live for His pleasure.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 9:8-10 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Which authorities in your life do you find it most difficult to submit to? Think of God standing behind that authority.
- 2) Is there an authority in your life you are overly intimidated by? Or do you tend to err on the other side – pushing for your way on every issue?
- 3) What gifts in life do you think God wants you to enjoy more?