

## Message #27

## Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

There is something that affects every one of us in one way or another—it is authority. It doesn't matter if one is a student or a teacher, a child or an adult, an employer or an employee—every one of us is subject to some authority. Now we learn from many passages of Scripture that God is the one who ordains authority:

- 1) I Samuel 2:7 says, “The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts.”
- 2) Psalm 75:6-7 says, “For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from desert comes exaltation; but God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another.”
- 3) Daniel 2:21 says, “And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men, and knowledge to men of understanding.”
- 4) Romans 13:1 says, “...For there is no authority except from God and those which exist are established by God.”

Clearly God is a God who takes full responsibility for governing authority. It is no wonder that Paul said we are to pray for “all who are in authority” (I Tim. 2:2), for he realized all in authority are put there by God.

**A KEY TO LIVING A MEANINGFUL AND FULFILLED LIFE IS BY MAINTAINING PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD THOSE IN AUTHORITY.**

**LESSON #1** – The one who will find meaning and fulfillment is one who can properly relate to Scripture and people. **8:1**

Now, the qualities in this verse may contextually refer to one in authority or one under authority. It is possible for one to be in authority and be wise and it is possible for one to be under authority and be wise.

**Quality #1** – The wise man is one who knows the proper interpretation. **8:1a**

The Hebrew word “interpretation” is one that refers to having the ability to explain or interpret something (Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 695). A wise person is one who can look at something and then explain it, even if it is difficult.

In O.T. times, this particularly had to do with the ability to hear some strange dream and then be able, by the supernatural wisdom of God, to give an interpretation of it. In N.T. times, one who is wise can look at the Scriptures and give a careful and accurate explanation of what it means. Such a person is wise by God's estimation.

Now notice carefully who is wise. It is not one given to the emotional; it is not one given to the irrational, it is not one given to the sensational, it is one given to the explanatory. Zeal and action must never replace thinking.

**Quality #2** – The wise man is one who has the proper countenance. **8:1b**

Now the word “stern” is one that can be a positive or a negative. The actual Hebrew word refers to one strong, mighty, firm and hard (*Ibid.*, p. 616). Wise people have a look about them that is firm. They are not surface level people and there is a certain strength and firmness.

Now the idea here is that when a man is becoming wise, his countenance or facial expression will not only have the serious side to it, but it also has an illumination. The Hebrew literally reflects having a face that shines. Having a face that shines is O.T. imagery for looking favorably and graciously upon someone (i.e. Num. 6:25-26).

As I understand the context, the wise person whether the one in authority or the one under authority, is one who not only is serious but also gracious. If the one is in authority, he is one who faces many negative pressures and threats, but he still knows how to treat people graciously. If one is under authority, he looks upon those in authority with grace and not with hostility.

**LESSON #2** – The one who will find meaning and fulfillment is one who will obey authority. **8:2**

People who ultimately find real meaning and fulfillment because God’s face of blessing is shining on them are people who obey authority. It is the mark of wisdom to “fear the LORD and the king” (Prov. 24:21).

It is difficult to interpret “because of the oath before God.” It may refer to an oath one made before God to do something such as obey the authority (i.e. I Kings 2:23). It was a custom for people to take an oath of allegiance or loyalty to the king (I Chron. 29:24; II Chron. 36:13; Ezek. 17:13). Or it may refer to the fact that God’s oath or decree has put one in authority. In either case, God takes a serious look at how subordinates respond to the council and commands of those in authority.

To blatantly refuse to obey those in authority is a very serious matter in the sight of God. Paul said, “let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities...” (Rom. 13:1).

**LESSON #3** – The one who will find meaning and fulfillment is one who will not be quick to oppose one in authority. **8:3-7**

Those who turn against God-ordained leadership are not moving in a direction of God’s blessings, but of sudden calamity (Prov. 24:21-22). Even if we do something that causes the ruler’s temper to rise, we should not abandon our position or seek a quick defection (Eccl. 10:4).

**Reason #1** - Such a uniting with others against one in authority is evil. **8:3b**

**Reason #2** - The one in authority has the right to do whatever he pleases. **8:3c**

Such an insurrection is not going to change the mind of one in authority and may in fact stimulate his anger. God will always work through this ordained leadership. He can turn a leader's mind any way He wishes (Prov. 21:1).

**Reason #3** - The one in authority is the one with authority. **8:5-6**

Just because a bunch of people don't like a leader does not change the fact that God is the one who gave him the authority to be a leader. When one gets before God, it will be the word of the leader that will carry an authoritative ring to it (i.e. Heb. 13:17), which will have eternal ramifications.

**Reason #4** - The one who submits to authority experiences no trouble. **8:5-6**

The one who does not oppose leadership will discover his life is basically tranquil in his relationship with authority. In fact, God will grant this type of individual the wisdom to know when to do and say something and when not to do and say something.

I like the words of Michael Eaton—"Submission is not to be blind passivity; the wise man will be alert to God's timing and 'proper procedures,' as were Jonathon (I Sam. 19:4-6), Nathan (II Sam. 12:1-14) and Esther (Est. 7:2-4).

God will not bring His judgmental calamity on one who submits to leadership. However, that does not mean one does not have a right to discuss matters with leadership.

**Reason #5** - No one knows what God is going to do in the future. **8:7**

Opposing God-ordained leadership is very foolish. Who knows what God is doing with the leadership?

**LESSON #4** – The one who will find meaning and fulfillment is one who recognizes the limitations of authority. **8:8**

**Limitation #1** - No authority is absolute authority. **8:8a**

No man of any authority can control God's will. All authority is still subject to the absolute, Sovereign God.

**Limitation #2** - No authority has authority over death. **8:8b**

No authority, no matter how powerful, can prevent or avert his appointed death hour.

**Limitation #3** - No authority should be discharged in time of war. **8:8c**

The word “discharge” is one that means to release, such as in a furlough. In the middle of a war, no authority can go on furlough and no soldiers should, either.

**Limitation #4** - No evil will ever wind up delivering people who did evil. **8:8d**

Those who proudly defy God-ordained authority will ultimately discover they will not be delivered from calamity God will send.

**LESSON #5** – The one who writes these things lived these things. **8:9**

Now, of course, the ultimate authority which wise people will always submit to is the authority of God found in His Word. Those who submit to God’s Word will always find meaning and fulfillment no matter who is in charge.