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Frustration

Ecclesiastes 8: 1-17

Frustration DIG: What reasons are given for obedience in verses 2-5? How will the wise person know the right time and judgment? Who seems to be the subject of Solomon's frustration? What is the problem in verse 11 and who is responsible for it? In verses 12 and 13 what injustice does the Teacher see? In what ways will it go better for the God-fearer?

REFLECT: What sort of injustices (personally, family, occupationally, nationally) are most likely to arouse you to act? Where do you draw the line? How does your search for answers to life's problem affect your relationship with God? How easy is it for you to trust in Him when the answers are unattainable? What can be done to develop such trust?

**Solomon gives us a ray of hope in the midst of our frustration.
Even with limited knowledge, we can see for Whom we have been made.**

At every turn in this chapter we will face our inability to master our own affairs. In one instance after another we see our inability to control our life **under the sun**, cutting **God** out of the picture.

Beyond our reach (8:1): In the previous teaching (**to see link click Cs - The Search Goes On**) **Solomon** informed **his** readers that **wisdom** was ultimately beyond their reach, saying: **Whatever exists is far off and most profound - who can discover it (7:23-24)?** What **he** did discover was the deep depravity of mankind. In light of the end of **Chapter 7**, the only possible answer to the rhetorical question at the beginning of **Chapter 8: Who can be compared with a wise person?** Is no one! Understanding this, the second part of the verse, then, must be sarcastic. **Who else knows what a thing means? Wisdom lights up the face and softens a grim appearance (8:1).** One can imagine the cheery, happy-faced **king**, at this point in the book, rejoicing in the carefree expression of others who claimed to be **wise**.³⁰¹

No choice (8:2-9): **Solomon** begins this section on the word of **the king** by warning that

his hearers should be careful to **obey, because of the oath before God. Don't be in a hurry to leave his presence and don't persist in doing what is wrong, for he does whatever he pleases.** Then **he** adds another reason for the reader to obey **the king** quietly: **After all, his word is final; who can challenge him, "Why are you doing that?"** Thus, it would be fruitless, even dangerous, to question **his** actions, and better just to do what **he** says. **Whoever obeys his command will never come to harm, and the wise person will know the right time and judgment. For everything there is a right time and a judgment,** but there is no real benefit to anyone **since people are greatly troubled by uncertainty over the future.** Now we come to the crux of the matter. **Solomon** stated **his** belief that **there is a right time** for everything. But now **he** admits a paradoxical truth: **since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? No one knows the right time. It's beyond our ability.**

Now **the Teacher** shows us four other instances where we have no control. **Just as no one has the power to keep the wind from blowing, so no one has power over the day of death. If one is drafted to fight a war, one can't send a substitute; likewise, the wicked won't escape death by their wickedness.** **Solomon** ends with a summary statement. **He** asserts that **his** remarks are based on **his** observation of life. **All this I have seen, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun where people have the power to hurt each other.**³⁰²



Frustration (8:10-13): There are few things more obnoxious than the sight of **wicked men** flourishing and complacent. Yet **wickedness** respected and given the appearance of **holiness** is even more sickening. **The villains** are honored at the very scene of **their** sinful behavior. The dictator or the corrupt politician may have bent the rules, it will be said; but after all, they got things done, they had flair, they lived in style. This is too much for **Solomon**. **He** is stung into one of **his** rare declarations of **his** own faith, dropping the veil of secularism which **he** normally adopts for the sake of the discussion. It has happened before

(2:26; 3:17; 5:18-20; 7:14), and in the final chapters it will no longer be the exception, but the rule.³⁰³

Thus, I saw the wicked buried; they had even come from the Holy Place. This verse clearly pinpoints the source of **Solomon's frustration**. **He** sees an unusual connection between **the Holy Place** and **the wicked** that contributes to **his** feeling that **the wicked** do not get what **they** deserve. **The wicked** may in fact die, but even then, **they** are praised in the city where **they** did **their evil deeds** and religious posturing. It is the fact that the wicked continue to receive the praise owed **the righteous** that **frustrates the Teacher**. **But those who had acted uprightly were forgotten in the city.** Thus, it leads **him** to utter **his** conclusion that **everything to come is pointless (8:10)**.

Solomon asserts that when there is no apparent **punishment** for **evil**, then **it** will flourish **because the punishment decreed for an evil act is not promptly carried out; therefore, people who plan to do evil are strengthened in their intentions.** The lack of retribution was at the heart of **the Teacher's frustration**. **For a sinner can do evil a hundred times and still live a long life; although I know that in the end things will go well with those who fear God, because they fear Him (see Psalm 73). But things will not go well with the wicked; and, like a shadow, he will not prolong his days; because he doesn't fear God (8:11-13).** The image of a **shadow** is appropriate here because as the day ends, **the shadows** gradually lengthen. Thus, the lives of **the wicked** will not grow longer as they approach the end of **their** days.³⁰⁴

Small expectations (8:14-15): There is something frustrating that occurs on earth, namely, that there are righteous people to whom things happen as if they were doing wicked deeds; and, again, there are wicked people to whom things happen as if they were doing righteous deeds. **I say that this too is pointless.** No one gets what they deserve! **The righteous** do not get rewarded, **they** get punished; **the wicked** do not get punished, **they** get rewarded. **So I recommend enjoyment** - the simple satisfactions are the soundest - **a person can do nothing better under the sun than eat, drink and enjoy himself; this is what should accompany him as he does his work for as long as God gives him to live under the sun (8:14-15).**

The riddle remains (8:16-17): If we needed reminding that hard work and simple living can only postpone our ultimate questions, never settle them, then this sequel to the bland advice of **verse 15** should be enough. The very busyness of life worries us into asking where it is all taking us, and what it means, if, indeed, it does mean anything. **When I applied myself to gain wisdom and to observe how people occupy themselves on earth, that**

people's eyes don't see sleep either by day or by night, then, on looking over all of God's work, I realized that it is impossible to grasp all the activity taking place under the sun; because even if a person works hard at searching it out, he won't grasp it; and even if a wise person thinks he knows it, he still won't be able to grasp it (8:16-17). We hardly need **the Teacher** to point out that this is the very question that defeats us. The world's long line of philosophies, each one in turn exposing the omissions of the ones before them, makes this all too clear.

But **Solomon** gives us a ray of hope. **He** says, "For it is **God's work** that puzzles us.' It is not a fable told to us by some idiot. Yet, what if it is told to an idiot. The chapter seems to end on such a note. It allows our **wisest men** and **women** no prospect of success. Nevertheless, we can pick up its meaning much better if we catch **Solomon's** illusion that **it is impossible to grasp all the activity taking place under the sun**, and then compare that to **3:11**, "but in speaking in **human** terms, we **can't fully comprehend, from beginning to end, the things God does.**" Even though we have limited knowledge, we can contemplate eternity. Although in time, we can see **God's work** in **frustrating** flashes. However, the very fact that we can think about the big picture of the universe and long to see it, is evidence enough that we are not entirely prisoners of our world. In more promising words, it is evidence of not only how, but for **Whom** we have been made.³⁰⁵

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You** are both holy and **love**. **You** do not let **evil** go unpunished, but wisely allow **evil's** pain and suffering to draw me closer to **Yourself** during hard times, and cause me to look to **You** for **wisdom** and comfort. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)**. You looked down on Isra'el during the days of the prophet **Jeremiah** and saw with great sadness that **Your** people worshiped idols, though the prophets warned them not to. In **wisdom**, **You disciplined them** to bring **them** back to the love and joy that **You** had for **them**. **Now all discipline seems painful at the moment - not joyful. But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11)**. **You** used Babylon to conquer Isra'el and **Your** wise **discipline** worked, for after the 70 years captivity Isra'el never again worshiped idols. Thank **You**, loving **Father**, that **You** are **Almighty**! **Evil** will be punished and **Your** righteousness will triumph! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*