

## Heavenly Wisdom and Subjection to Lawful Authority #1

Ecclesiastes 8:1-5; Romans 13:4

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Heavenly wisdom is not only needed by those who are in authority, but also by those who are under authority. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon not only declares the need for the magistrate to act wisely (Proverbs 20:26), but also for the subject under the magistrate to act wisely as well (Proverbs 16:14). Heavenly wisdom is especially needed by faithful Christians when the civil magistrate has rejected the Law of God as the supreme law of the land, or when the law of the land is not founded upon what God requires in the Ten Commandments, but rather is founded upon the popular opinions of legislators and judges.

Let us be clear. The United States through its federal Constitution and civil Rulers has rejected the God, the Christ, the Religion, and the Commandments revealed in Holy Scripture. The Federal Constitution does not mention God as having instituted civil government, does not speak of Christ as King of kings, does not speak of the Christian Religion as the only true religion, and does not speak of the Bible as the supreme law of the land, even one time. This was not an accidental oversight on the part of those founding fathers, but an intentional decision to make this nation a nation of many gods and of many religions, in express violation of the First Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). For the toleration of false religions is a promotion of those same false religions. It is not being neutral with regard to religion, when God says there should only be one religion established within a nation—the one true Christian Religion revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures. A nation that establishes and protects by law the practice of every false religion (in express violation of God’s Commandment) is not ruling for God, but against God at the most fundamental level. A nation that establishes laws that allow the profaning of the Sabbath Day (in violation of the Fourth Commandment) is not ruling for God, but against God. A nation that establishes laws that protect the murder of millions of unborn children (in violation of the Sixth Commandment) is not ruling for God, but against God. A nation that establishes laws that protect the practice of fornication, adultery, incest, and sodomy is not ruling for God, but against God.

Believe me when I say, I take no delight in noting such flagrant and habitual violations of the Law of Him who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is not because I hate my country that I mention such gross violations of God’s Law, but because I love my country and earnestly desire and pray for her repentance in having sinned against God’s express commandments. “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

As we consider our text this Lord’s Day, we must not only consider our duty under a lawful Constitution and under lawful magistrates, but also our duty when the Constitution and magistrates are not lawful. The main points from our text are these: (1) The Beauty of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 8:1); and (2) The Submission of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 8:2-5).

### I. The Beauty of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

A. There are two things that Solomon says he had applied his heart to seek out and know in Ecclesiastes 7:25: wisdom and folly. Solomon did indeed find out the vanity of folly, for he sought to find a lasting joy in many earthly possessions and endeavors, as you will recall from Ecclesiastes 2:1-11: pleasure, laughter, wine and food, great building projects that would outlive himself, beautiful gardens and orchards, multitudes of servants, livestock, silver and gold, music, and hundreds of wives and concubines. But because Solomon did not seek to enjoy, first and foremost, the God who gave him all this wealth, he found that all that he had was vanity and emptiness. It did not satisfy, nor bring him the joy that he sought. Dear ones, true joy is

to be found, first and foremost, in God (the fount of every blessing) and in the wisdom that comes from heaven above. Just as Solomon demonstrated the way of folly in seeking to find joy and contentment in his hundreds of wives and concubines (Ecclesiastes 7:26-29), so now (in Ecclesiastes 8:1-5) he considers the joy to be found in the way of heavenly wisdom, as applied to the area of submission to lawful authority. It is not the rebellious and disobedient that are happy, but rather the submissive and obedient that know the joy of the Lord in their lives. The most miserable and unhappy people in the world are those who must always have things done their way. They cannot be told to do anything without uttering a disrespectful word or giving a great sigh, as if it were the greatest burden in the world to do what is asked of them or commanded of them. But before Solomon considers more fully the grace of godly submission (in Ecclesiastes 8:2-5), he extols the beauty of heavenly wisdom (in Ecclesiastes 8:1).

B. Solomon begins by asking two questions in Ecclesiastes 8:1.

1. "Who is AS the wise man?"

a. The word "AS" indicates that there is a comparison being drawn from this question. The response expected from this question is that there is none among mere mortals to be compared with the wise man, wise woman, or wise child. Why? Because heavenly wisdom assumes a growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; and heavenly wisdom is further realized in applying that grace and knowledge in one's own life. The rich of this world, the talented and gifted of this world, the intellectuals of this world, or the powerful of this world, all fall short of the blessedness of those who are wise because they possess the wisdom that comes from heaven above. Heavenly wisdom is being filled with the mind of Christ.

b. You may never attain to the riches, talents, learning, or power of some in this world, but, dear ones, each of you can be filled with the mind of Christ in knowing and applying Christ's truth to every area of your life. When you compare the relative importance, you, as parents, place before your children in reaching certain educational goals, or certain athletic goals, or certain musical goals, or certain employment goals, forget not what is most important is that your children reach out by faith to receive Christ and His righteousness, and exercise themselves to godliness, and be filled with the mind of Christ by seeking to cultivate in them a hungering and thirsting for the Lord Jesus Christ. How do you cultivate a hungering and thirsting in your child?

(1) By your own example of hungering and thirsting for Christ in what you say and in what you do—in humble repentance when you sin before them, in the decisions that you make the glory of Christ should be uppermost, in their observation of your faithfulness in secret worship and family worship. If these things are not important to you, it is unlikely that they will be important to your children.

(2) By your diligent use of the means of grace in cultivating that hungering and thirsting in them—whether it be a Christian education, loving correction and discipline, teaching them to pray and to read their Bibles in secret worship, teaching them to remember their baptism and what God has promised to them in the gospel and what they must promise to Him in trusting Him, loving Him, and obeying Him, teaching them to prepare themselves with reverence when they approach the Lord in worship, and preparing them for marriage by teaching them to wait for one who shares the same convictions and love for Jesus Christ.

c. Is it your earnest desire to have heavenly wisdom, even before other necessary and profitable desires in this world? Listen to the words of the wisest mere mortal that ever lived: Read Proverbs 4:7.

2. The second question asked by Solomon (in Ecclesiastes 8:1) concerning the beauty of heavenly wisdom is this: "Who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?"

a. The question expects the answer, "Those who have heavenly wisdom know the interpretation of a thing." For again there is a distinction between mere knowledge and the application of that

knowledge in wisdom. This question is simply pointing out that the wisdom of the wise is not only for themselves, but is for the benefit of others to whom the knowledge of Christ may be explained in terms that others may understand. If you have by God's grace a knowledge of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, you must pray that you also would grow in your ability to explain that knowledge of Christ to your children, to your family members, and to your neighbor as God gives you opportunity.

b. This question presupposes that you are seeking to live what you explain to others. For if you have not even applied the truth to your own life in living it before others, what will be the likely response from others who see such a contradiction in what you explain and in how you live? "Practice what you preach", or "Physician, heal thyself."

c. Dear ones, those who have a measure of heavenly wisdom and are seeking to apply that knowledge of the truth are the very ones who prize heavenly wisdom the most and pray for it the most. If you are not thinking much about heavenly wisdom nor praying much for it, it is because you must be lacking in it and lacking in an earnest desire for more of it—to your shame and mine we sin against the grace of God.

C. Solomon now gives two effects or results that come to the person who is graciously endowed by Christ with heavenly wisdom (in Ecclesiastes 8:1). Both of these effects mentioned by Solomon are able to be observed by others in your outward behavior. This is what you would expect if God's grace is working effectually within a person. He/She will manifest that inward grace in the way that he/she lives, walks, and talks.

1. The first effect is this: "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine." A shining face brings to mind the face of Moses, who beheld the glory of the Lord and that glory was reflected in his countenance (according to Exodus 34:29). Likewise, we read concerning Stephen, that as he appeared before the Sanhedrin, his face appeared as that of an angel's face (Acts 6:15). There was something about his countenance that was observable to those who hated him and despised the Christ whom he proclaimed. Solomon likewise states that when the mind of Christ fills us with His heavenly wisdom, you are not only changed within, but you are also changed without in the way you live and behave before others. This is the beauty of heavenly wisdom. Is the holiness of God beautiful to you? Are you attracted to those who are godly? Do you desire to be holy and reflect the glory of Christ in your life? Dear ones, your life will not shine if you do not even desire the beauty of heavenly wisdom, the righteousness of Christ, or the joy of the Lord. Consider how the lives of Paul and Silas must have shined forth in that dark prison cell there in Philippi, when they sang praises to God after being unjustly beaten (Acts 16:15). This led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family (and perhaps others in the jail who did not try to escape when the earthquake shook the doors open and loosed the chains that bound all of the prisoners).

2. The second effect of heavenly wisdom is stated by Solomon in these words: "the boldness of his face shall be changed." The Hebrew word for "boldness" means "fierceness", "hardness", "sternness", or "severity" (as we see in passages like Deuteronomy 28:50; Daniel 8:23; Proverbs 21:29). In other words, the one who is beautified with heavenly wisdom begins to treat people with charity, meekness, and patience, even when it would be so natural to take a fierce and stern approach with others. There is certainly a time to show forth a holy sternness with those who obstinately pollute the true religion, as when Christ chased the moneychangers out of the temple (or when the gentle approach has been tried and mocked by others, a godly sternness may be necessary in order to make a truth clear to the mocker—but not out of vengeance or in rash anger). But there is also a time not to break the bruised reed and not to quench the smoking flax (and I would suggest that this is ordinarily the case and especially the case with our wives, husbands, children, parents, or brothers and sisters in Christ). An amazing quality about our holy Savior was how patient and longsuffering He was with His own disciples, who acted so immaturely time and time again. It is human to snap at people when they have offended us—it is divine to be patient and not to return anger for

anger or offence for offence. Dear ones, is the sternness of your face and your words turning people away from Christ? When the demoniac was set free by Christ from those demons that drove him into the caves and made him act like a mad man, it was said of him (in Mark 5:15) that he was found clothed and in his right mind. Dear ones, the grace of heavenly wisdom turns your hardness of heart into a gentleness and brokenness of heart before God and others. Instead of fuming with anger at others, you learn to pity them. Husbands, do your wives know you more by the severity of your words and deeds, or by the gentleness of your words and deeds? Wives, do your husbands see more hardness or more gentleness in your words and deeds? Dear brothers and sisters, do we come across to one another in our speech as seeking to break one another into pieces, or rather do we come across as having been broken into pieces by Christ?

## **II. The Submission of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 8:2-5).**

A. There is a very natural connection between what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 8:1 and what he says in Ecclesiastes 8:2-5. For when the hard countenance is changed into a gentle countenance by heavenly wisdom, one will learn how to submit cheerfully to all lawful authority.

B. At the outset, we must ask a couple questions which many Christians in churches today would likely not even consider asking at all. However, we must ask these questions, if we would be faithful to the whole revelation of God as found in Scripture, as we discuss the matter of lawful submission to those in authority.

1. Is submission required when there is no lawful biblical authority in place unto whom you might submit?

2. Is submission required when there is a lawful biblical authority in place, but when what is commanded of you is not lawful or reasonable?

C. Let us begin with the first question: Is submission required when there is no lawful biblical authority in place unto whom you might submit?

1. When God calls you to submit to those in authority, it is assumed that those in authority have a moral right from God to exercise that right of rule (Romans 13:1). In other words, just because someone says, "I am a Ruler", does not necessarily mean he has the moral right to rule.

a. Just because someone outside of your home asserts himself to be the head of your home does not make him the head of your home. If he is not lawfully called to that office by way of a lawful marriage, his claim to rule in your home has no lawful biblical or moral basis. There is no requirement for you to conscientiously submit to him. Why? He has simply asserted a claim to be a ruler in your home, but has not established a lawful right to be that ruler. Now what is true in the home is also true in the church and in the nation as well.

b. In the ecclesiastical realm, the Pope (as that Papal Antichrist spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13) asserts his rule to be the head of the Visible Church upon earth. Does his mere assertion make him a lawful ruler over you? That is obviously not the case, otherwise you would be required to conscientiously submit to his lawful authority. The fact that you do not conscientiously submit to his authority assumes you do not consider him to have lawful authority from Christ to rule over you (regardless of his pretended claims to that authority and rule).

c. In the civil realm, those who rule must likewise have a moral right and lawful biblical authority to exercise that authority. To simply assert the right to rule is not to establish that right to rule. For if all those who rule in the civil realm have a right to your conscientious submission (regardless of how they treat God and His commandments), then you must conscientiously submit to every tyrant that makes it to the top (regardless of how he got to the top). Were those in Nazi Germany required to conscientiously submit to Hitler as a lawful ruler (despite the flagrant and habitual violation of God's Law)? Are

those in Communist China required to conscientiously submit to their rulers as lawful rulers (despite the flagrant and habitual violation of God's Law)? Were those in Israel required to conscientiously submit to the various godless nations that conquered them or to tyrants who seized power unlawfully? Dear ones, lawful submission implies lawful authority. And lawful authority implies ruling on behalf of God and according to His righteous standards as found in the Law of God and as found in the Law of Nature. Dear ones, those who have lawful authority to rule as civil leaders are not called the ministers of the people, but are called the ministers of God (according to Romans 13:4). Where there is no lawful biblical basis for rule, there is no lawful biblical basis for submission. A conscientious submission implies there is a lawful biblical ruler in place. Where there is a lawful biblical ruler in place, rebellion against that ruler or seeking to overthrow that ruler is a grievous sin against God's own authority, who has given that lawful ruler that authority to rule (Romans 13:2).

2. Those constitutions or rulers that flagrantly and habitually break the Law of God have no moral right to rule (2 Samuel 23:2-3; Job 34:17; Romans 13:4). When a constitution (such as our own) requires no loyalty to God, to Jesus Christ, to the one true Christian Religion, or to the Holy Scriptures, but rather omits all deference to God and His anointed King, Jesus Christ, and rather declares that the constitution itself (rather than the Law of God) is the supreme law of the land, and rather declares that Congress shall not establish the one true Christian religion of the Bible as the religion of the land, but shall tolerate (and therefore promote) all false religions and all false gods as equal to the one true religion and God of the Bible, then I submit to you that such a constitution is unlawful and unbiblical and one which Christians cannot in good conscience own or swear to uphold, either themselves personally, or through elected representatives. Dear ones, is it any wonder that hardly anything is sacred any longer, whether it be the Triune God of the Bible, or God's Word, or the true Christian religion, or the Sabbath, or parental rights to educate and discipline children, or the life of the unborn, the handicapped, and the elderly, or the ordinance of marriage, or the property of man which can be taxed or taken from him at the whim of the government? For when a constitution is the supreme law of the land, it is regulated by the whim of the people and not by the absolute standard of God's righteous Law and commandments. Dear ones, we, as Covenanters, are not anti-government people. We love lawful civil government, for it is the ordinance of God. What we earnestly pray for and earnestly desire is for the Lord to establish the throne of our government upon God's righteous laws. Until such a time, we cannot conscientiously submit to the unlawful authority of the Federal Constitution or rulers who swear to uphold it. To own them as lawful would be to sin against God. We rather submit to them for wrath's sake (rather than for conscience sake). We seek to live peaceably and to pray for and seek reformation, and we endeavor to comply with all laws that do not force us to sin against God (Acts 5:29).

D. We must stop here for today, but is it not already clear from what has been said about the matter of submission, how important it is that we have the wisdom that comes from heaven above in order to know when rulers are lawful and when their commandments are lawful? O, dear ones, never forget that lawful submission to rulers will simply not happen when there is no lawful submission to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Rebellion against lawful authority begins with rebellion against the supreme authority of God Himself. If you must always have things done your way, or if you cannot bear to be corrected by others, or if you continually seem to have a problem with those in authority wherever you go, it likely points you to an even bigger problem—you have a problem with God Himself, who has supreme and absolute authority over you. If God (by His grace) does not break the rebellious heart so that you earnestly desire to submit to Jesus Christ as not only Savior, but as Lord and King of your life, you will give little or no evidence of belonging to Him as His thankful people. One of the greatest evidences of the work of God's grace in the life of a Christian is humble and cheerful submission to the will of God. "Not my will, but thine be done."

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