

## **Is God's Patience Leading You to Repentance?**

Ecclesiastes 8:9-13; Romans 2:3-4

September 3, 2006

Rev. Greg L. Price

God's patience with sinners, who daily rebel against Him, is absolutely amazing. Think how many times you have committed the same sins against God and your neighbor; how many times you have sinned with your eyes wide open; how many times you have prayed, repented, and sought forgiveness just to fall again and again into that same sin? Then think how your heavenly Father has patiently loved you, corrected you, brought you to see your offence against Him and your neighbor, and has forgiven you, rather than sending fire from heaven to immediately consume you or your loved ones.

You, who are so impatient with one another, should take a closer look at the wonders of God's patience with guilty undeserving sinners. The patience of God will have one of two effects in your life and mine. Either you will harden yourself in your sin and rebellion against the Lord, or you will be broken and contrite in your heart before the Lord. Either you will see the patience of God as an excuse to continue in your sin, or you will see the patience of God as a reason to turn from your sin. Either you will be made proud by the patience of God, or you will be humbled by the patience of God.

Is God's gracious patience leading you to Christ or away from Christ? Dear ones, a tangible evidence of God's work of grace in the life of the child of God is that God's patience leads him/her to the Savior. What effect is God's patience having in your life?

Solomon continues to discuss the subject of rulers in the text before us today, and brings forth the following two truths for your consideration: (1) The Wicked Ruler Rules to His Own Hurt (Ecclesiastes 8:9-10); (2) The Wicked Ruler Is Hardened by God's Patience (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13).

### **I. The Wicked Ruler Rules to His Own Hurt (Ecclesiastes 8:9-10).**

A. In Ecclesiastes 8, Solomon has brought before our attention how heavenly wisdom is manifested in the matter of submission to authority. In Ecclesiastes 8:1-5, Solomon covered submission to human authority; and in Ecclesiastes 8:6-8, he extended his discussion of authority to include submission to Divine authority. Before leaving the subject of earthly rulers, Solomon (in Ecclesiastes 8:9-13) now challenges wicked rulers to consider the vanity and emptiness of their ungodly ways, and likewise encourages good rulers to take heed to the many ill effects that will befall them, if they do not continue to govern as God's ministers of righteousness (Romans 13:4).

B. Solomon is inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to you (as the Preacher) concerning his own repentance and the folly of seeking a lasting joy in the pleasures of this life. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 8:9: "All this I have seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun." Solomon had learned first-hand how the comforts and blessings of this life can be idolized and viewed as being the source of joy. For Solomon had fallen away from the Lord earlier in his life, seeking to find joy and satisfaction within from a pursuit of the creature rather than from a pursuit of the Creator. He sought for a lasting joy in his immense wealth, in his religious experiences, in his many illicit relationships with women, in the storehouse of his knowledge of the world, and in the exercise of authority and rule. But his pursuit of an enduring joy in the things of this world only led him to see more clearly that the joy of the Lord and a peace that passes all understanding are not to be found in the pleasures of this world, but rather are to be found only in the pleasure of knowing Christ, of trusting Christ, of loving Christ, and of obeying Christ. Only when you find your

joy IN THE LORD will you be able to enjoy what God graciously gives to you of this world's comforts and pleasures. Have you likewise come to the place in your life where you have acknowledged and confessed with your whole heart that the pleasures and comforts of this world cannot bring a lasting joy that will carry you through the trials and afflictions of this life and bring you the comfort you will need when facing death? The pleasures of this world will not be able to comfort you at death because you will be leaving everything in this life behind. If you do not find your reason and purpose for living in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be among those to be most pitied at your death, for you will die in the greatest state of sorrow and fear, having no hope of the everlasting joys of heaven.

C. Solomon now turns again to a consideration of human authority and the terrible consequences that will befall those wicked rulers who have merely sought their own pleasure, their own honor, and their own power, rather than having sought to be a minister of God for the good of those who are ruled. Solomon no doubt included this whole matter of human authority within the compass of subjects that he had also applied his heart unto in seeking to find a joy that is constant and that endures in every circumstance and trial. Solomon now reveals what he learned concerning the very sobering conclusion that will befall wicked rulers.

1. First, wicked rulers rule to their own hurt rather than to their own good: "There is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt" (Ecclesiastes 8:9).

a. Not only do wicked rulers rule to the hurt of others, but Solomon says they rule to their own hurt. For they act as though they are God rather than the minister of God. They seek to make a name for themselves in the exercise of their power. They hope to find joy in having people jump when they snap their fingers. They have deceived themselves into believing that joy is found in controlling others, rather than in serving God and others as God's minister. Ultimately, wicked rulers rule to their own hurt in that all the power God has given to them is used for their own destruction, rather than for their own sanctification. Power and control become an idol before which the wicked ruler bows, and so he worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator to his own final destruction in hell.

b. Dear ones, what blessings from the Lord do you use to your own hurt because you use them not to glorify God, but to exalt yourself. You use them not to serve others, but merely to serve yourself. You use them not with a thankful heart, but with a discontented spirit complaining about the many things you do not have but want. You use that blessing expecting to find joy in it, rather than seeking joy in the God who has given that blessing to you. In all these ways (and many more), you use what God has given to you for your own hurt, rather than for your own spiritual good and profit because you have forgotten what you truly deserve from the Lord for your many sins committed against Him: namely, eternal torment in the lake of fire. You have forgotten that every drop of water, every crumb of bread, every beat of the heart, every breath you take, every necessity and comfort you receive in this life is a free gift from God that you do not deserve. You have forgotten that the Lord is the fount of every blessing (and especially the blessings of forgiveness and everlasting life). What a judgment awaits those on that great and terrible day when God will judge the wicked for how they used the many good gifts they were given by Him to their own hurt. What a demonstration of the sin and corruption within man and a realization of your need of Christ to help you to use all that God gives you for your own spiritual profit and benefit.

2. A second terrible consequence that will befall the wicked ruler is that he will be forgotten: "And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity" (Ecclesiastes 8:10).

a. All wicked rulers have an eye to their own power and authority and a desire to leave behind them a great name. They desire to be remembered in the history books as one who was skilled, knowledgeable, an economic or military genius, a powerful orator, a cunning diplomat, or a savior to his people.

b. The wicked communist ruler of China, Mao Tse-tung, had his name and picture

everywhere before the young and old of China while he was in power for over thirty years. I just read that in the most recent history book published by the Chinese government for students in China, one sentence is devoted to Chairman Mao. His memory is quickly being erased.

c. But this is true, Solomon says, of all of the wicked (Proverbs 10:7). And even when names of leaders in various fields are remembered in one sense (for their accomplishments whether good or bad), they are not remembered in the most important sense: namely, as being those who used their talents and abilities to serve the Lord and to promote His Kingdom here on earth. This is being remembered in the most important sense. To be remembered and not forgotten does not mean merely that the name and accomplishments of one is remembered. In that sense, even the wicked are remembered like Pharaoh, Haman, Judas, and Satan himself. However, to be remembered and not forgotten in the biblical sense is a moral remembering not simply an intellectual remembering. It is a remembering of the name of the righteous because he/she trusted in Christ alone for salvation, because he/she loved the Lord, loved God's truth, loved God's holiness, and loved God's people. The reason why the memory of the righteous shall be blessed and not rot is because God remembers them for good rather than for evil.

d. Solomon says that the wicked ruler for all his pomp and power will be buried (perhaps with great worldly honor and acclaim), but his name will be forgotten, because he was not the minister of God to God's people for good.

e. The wicked ruler may have even come and gone from the place where the ordinances of God were administered (most likely this means the "holy" in a religious sense as the Temple of the Old Testament, or the Church of the New Testament). But rather than using the ordinances of God to his good and to his benefit, he increased the gravity of his sin by merely going through the motions and offering sacrifices with blood on his hands and wickedness in his heart (Isaiah 1:10-17).

f. Dear ones, when you face death, for what do you want to be remembered? What will be most important as you face death? Will it be your accomplishments, achievements, degrees, homes, or wealth? Or will it be your faith in Christ, your love for Christ, His holiness, His truth, and His people? Whatever you want to be remembered for is that which you will consider to be most important in your life. What memory are you building in the lives of your family, brothers and sisters in Christ, and neighbors about yourself? How will those who know you best remember you after you are buried? Will they remember your love for Christ and your desire to obey Him or your love for the things of this world? You are all building a memory for yourself before others today. The only question is what memory is being built: a memory that will encourage others to trust and love Christ, or a memory that will soon be forgotten, because nothing of Christ was prominent or important in your life? It is vanity and emptiness to get to the end of your life and for your name to be forgotten because the Lord Jesus Christ was not your joy, nor your reason and purpose for living.

## **II. The Wicked Ruler Is Hardened by God's Patience (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13).**

A. Solomon now states that there is a second ill effect and sobering consequence that comes upon the wicked ruler: he is hardened in his sin and rebellion against God when God delays His punishment upon him.

1. Solomon knows the nature of man so well (and not just that of wicked rulers) when he says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). In other words, when God shows His kindness to you in not bringing immediate judgment upon you for your sin and rebellion against Him, you (in your corrupt nature) are not drawn to repent of your sin, your heart is not softened, but rather you become more obstinate in your sin. This is true of a wicked ruler, but it is the disposition of you all, due to the corrupt nature you have inherited from Adam. Does this not reveal so clearly how wicked you are by nature, that you would take the longsuffering and patience of God and turn it into a reason to continue in your sin? But this is simply the way

that man responds to all of the blessings of God apart from the grace of God working effectually in his/her life. That person will take every good gift from the Lord and use it for his/her own hurt and destruction. Likewise apart from the grace of God you will take every good and perfect gift from a gracious God and find a way to use it to promote your sin rather than His righteousness.

2. Dear ones, God would be perfectly just if He were to pour out His infinite wrath upon us at the first instance of sin. He would be absolutely fair to send misery upon misery without relief upon us due to the sins that we commit against Him and against our neighbor throughout every day. For that is what our sin deserves. That is the judgment of equity that ought to befall us. There are instances in which God did not delay His temporal judgment upon those who sinned (Miriam was smitten with leprosy without any apparent delay when she spoke against her brother, Moses, in Numbers 12; the fifty soldiers were consumed by fire on the spot when they sought Elisha on behalf of the king in 2 Kings 1; Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was immediately struck with leprosy when he lied to Elisha in 2 Kings 5; Ananias and Sapphira were slain on the spot for lying to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5; and Herod was slain by the Lord without delay when he received the acclamation of deity from his servants in Acts 12). In so many instances, one of the attributes of God's goodness is His patience in delaying His judgment. We see how God delayed His temporal judgment against Israel for many years in not bringing heathen nations against them (Jeremiah 7:13,25). We see how God even delayed his temporal judgment against the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) and the Amorites (Genesis 15:16). Why does God patiently delay His judgment?

a. In the first place, God delays His judgment as an act of goodness in order to lead men to repentance (Romans 2:3-4).

b. In the second place, God delays his judgment as an act of His justice in hardening the hearts of the wicked who hate Him, so as to further demonstrate the heinousness of their sin and rebellion against Him—that even when God delayed His judgment the wicked used that time not to repent, but to set their feet upon ungodly paths (Psalm 73:18-19; Psalm 92:7).

3. Dear ones, are you using or abusing the patience and longsuffering of God? You can either look at God's patience as excusing your sin or as permitting you time to repent. You can either look at God's forbearance with you as giving you more time to continue in your sin or as making it clear to you that it is now time to repent of your sin while the judgment of the Lord waits. The godly are humbled at the patience of God in delaying His severe discipline. The ungodly are hardened at the patience of God in restraining His judgment. The spiritual condition of your hearts, dear ones, is revealed to a large extent by how you respond to the patience of God.

4. Dear ones, how good is your God to delay that eternal judgment and to give you time to turn in faith to Christ as your only hope of eternal salvation. Do not be like the wicked ruler in Ecclesiastes 8:10, who even frequented "the place of the holy" and received the outward ordinances of worship, but because he merely went through the motions and did not exercise faith in Christ nor take His sin seriously, the impending judgment of God was only delayed for a time, just to fall with all of its fury upon him.

B. Solomon concludes this section in Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 by revealing how the patience of God will be for the good of those who fear God, but will be for the destruction of those who do not fear God. Beloved, when you sin and rebel against the Lord, or sin against your wife or husband, children or parents, brothers or sisters in Christ, do you take your time in repenting or can you not repent soon enough? The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31). You can tell whether you fear God, hold Him in awe and wonder, and take Him seriously by how quickly you seek to repent of sin that you have committed. Fall upon the mercy of God in thanking Him and praising Him for His gracious patience in delaying His judgment, so that you might be led to repentance.

Copyright 2006 Greg L. Price.

