

## **Mature and Immature Rulers**

Ecclesiastes 10:16-20; Psalm 84:11

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Those who rule in the family, church, and state must always remember that they do so (first and foremost) for the glory and exaltation of God. They do not lawfully rule in order to satisfy some inner desire for power, or to be served by others, or to promote their own agenda. All who are in places of lawful authority have those offices in order to serve the Lord supremely as His minister. They must hold these offices as a sacred trust committed to them by God, realizing that if they turn from God and from His truth, they cannot help but dishonor the Lord God Almighty. When those who rule faithfully follow the Lord (regardless of the personal cost or sacrifice), it is not guaranteed that those who are ruled by them will always agree with them or even consider their government a blessing to them. There were those who did not consider the government of Moses a blessing to them. There were those who did not consider the government of David a blessing to them (even his own son, Absalom, stole the hearts of the people from David). There were even those who did not (and still do not) consider the government of Christ to be a blessing to them (for they will not have Christ to rule over them). Thus, the response of those who are ruled to those who lawfully rule cannot be the determining factor as to whether a ruler (in the family, church, or state) is faithfully ruling. For there is within us all a natural tendency to express our independency, to think we could do a better job of ruling than those who are over us, or to take offense at rulers (even when they rule faithfully as unto the Lord). Thus, God's glory must be the chief end of rule and God's law must be the chief standard by which to rule.

Before moving on to consider our text this Lord's Day, we must also make it clear that those who rule (in the family, church, and state) not only rule (first and foremost) for the glory of God, but also for the good of those being ruled. They rule to promote good order rather than anarchy, to promote righteousness rather than wickedness, and to promote God's blessing rather than God's curse. Those who rule must view themselves as servants: servants of God (first and foremost) and servants of those who are being ruled. No one can rule faithfully over others if one does not first learn to be a servant of his fellow man. Even Christ, the Son of God, came as our Mediator to serve. Whereas much of what Solomon has thus far written in Ecclesiastes 10 addresses the duties of those who are under the government of others, Solomon also addresses duties (in our text today) for those who exercise government. Let us consider the following main points from our text in Ecclesiastes 10:16-20: (1) The Effect of Rulers (Ecclesiastes 10:16-17); (2) The Idleness of Rulers (Ecclesiastes 10:18-19); and (3) The Respect Due to Rulers (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

### **I. The Effect of Rulers (Ecclesiastes 10:16-17).**

A. In the previous section of Ecclesiastes, which we have already considered (Ecclesiastes 10:12-15), the inspired Preacher, Solomon, identified characteristics and behavior of the fool in the way he speaks in the presence of a ruler: namely, the fool speaks to his own destruction, the fool rambles on endlessly with many words, and the fool for all of his words and professed knowledge, does not apply what he knows to his own life. Such characteristics will not promote good government in the family, church, or state.

B. Solomon, being a king and ruler himself, now turns his attention to the duties of those who govern. Since Ecclesiastes was likely written toward the end of Solomon's life after he had been restored to the Lord from his gross backsliding into idolatry, King Solomon could speak with a humility gleaned from his own personal failure, as to the effect that godly rulers have on the people under them and the effect ungodly rulers have on the people under them. We do not rejoice in Solomon's fall, but we do rejoice that through that fall, Solomon was greatly humbled before the Lord and by God's grace was enabled to repent and to recount

for us what the Lord taught him. Here, dear ones, is encouragement to every Christian to watch and pray that he/she enter not into temptation due to pride and conceit, forgetting how susceptible and vulnerable each of us is to the temptations of the enemy of our soul. If we proudly stand back and look at the fall of others, or at the discipline of others, thinking ourselves better than they, or if their fall makes us feel good about ourselves, watch out! We are simply setting ourselves up for a very big fall. However, if we are greatly humbled before God, as we observe the fall of others, knowing that it is only because of God's grace that we stand, we will become good students in the School of Christ. Solomon had learned humility before God through his own fall, and for this reason he comes to us as the repentant Preacher (Ecclesiastes 1:1). Solomon had learned that he was what he was by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10).

C. King Solomon first addresses the effect of an immature ruler on the people (Ecclesiastes 10:16), and then he addresses the effect of a mature ruler on the people (Ecclesiastes 10:17).

1. Solomon says that a land (or a family or a church for that matter) is in a woeful condition when the king or ruler is childish, immature, inexperienced, and unconcerned about his duties (Ecclesiastes 10:16). When Solomon pronounces a woe upon those who have a child for a ruler, he is not strictly addressing the age of the ruler, but is rather addressing the lack of discernment to judge between right and wrong on the part of the ruler. Solomon calls himself "but a child" at the beginning of his reign (1 Kings 3:7). Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that Solomon was 14 years old when he began to rule (*Antiquities*, VIII, VII, 8). And yet the early years of his reign were marked by a godly maturity and wisdom unprecedented. He actually turned to childish foolishness when he became "old" (according to 1 Kings 11:4). Solomon says that the immaturity of a ruler is manifested in the way he approaches the day that is before him ("and thy princes eat in the morning" Ecclesiastes 10:16). Does the ruler primarily care about his duties to God and to his fellow man, or does he primarily care that he is comfortable and that his appetites and desires are satisfied? You see, for the childish (immature) ruler, everything is about him, rather than everything being for the honor of God and the good of those under him. We might say that a ruler (regardless of age) is really a child at heart . . .

- a. When he is ignorant of or does not care about his duties, but rather needs to be instructed as to the seriousness of his calling and duties.
- b. When he is easily turned from his duty by the pleasures of the world or by the persuasions of man, rather than having firm convictions based upon the unshakeable foundation of God's truth.
- c. When he is controlled by his own passions (whether anger, lust, fear etc.), rather than being controlled by the Holy Spirit.
- d. When he is motivated in his duty by the flattery, applause, and approval of men, rather than motivated in his duty by the approval of God (regardless of the consequences).
- e. When he is all talk and does not in wisdom apply the truth to the rule of governing his own life or to the rule of governing others.
- f. When he is vainly puffed up with his own accomplishments, rather than humbled that God would choose to use such an undeserving sinner to accomplish anything for God's glory.
- g. When he is unable to persevere in his duties due to affliction, trials, and opposition, rather than clinging to Christ, even when everything around him seems to be falling apart.
- h. When he wants only to be served, rather than to serve God and others. One of the most conspicuous characteristics of a child is the focus a child has on himself/herself. Is your immaturity in rule having the effect of a woe and curse to others (whether you are a parent, a husband, a boss/supervisor, a minister, or an elder)? What areas of immature childishness that were just mentioned are being manifested in your life, for which you need to repent with godly sorrow, to seek the mercy of God and His forgiveness, and to endeavor new obedience?

2. Solomon then turns the spotlight upon the blessed effect of those who are ruled by one who is mature and dutiful toward God and others (Ecclesiastes 10:17).

a. This mature ruler is referred to as “the son of nobles” (i.e. he is distinguished not so much by his noble blood or rank, but is distinguished by the noble grace of God that is working in him and is evident in his life by his leaning upon the righteousness of Christ alone, by his trust in the power of a sovereign God to work that which is impossible to man, by his desire to be humble before God and man, by his courage in fearing and holding God in awe and wonder more than he fears any man, by his integrity in endeavoring to practice godliness, not only when is in public, but when he is with his family or is all alone, and by his steadfast commitment every day to seek the grace of God through prayer in order to be a servant and in order to crucify his own pride, lusts, and selfishness.

b. Whereas the immature ruler is characterized by eating “in the morning”, the mature ruler is characterized by eating “in due season”. He does not live to eat, but eats to live. He does not eat to overindulge himself in that which is good, but eats in moderation (“and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness”). In other words, his life does not revolve around satisfying his earthly appetites, desires, or even needs (whether it be food, sex, or pleasure). A ruler who cannot wait for God’s fit time to have even that which is good or to be moderate in the use of God’s earthly blessings is one who is controlled by his lusts and desires.

(1) Marriage is good, honorable, and desirable, but when the desire to be married consumes you to the point that you think of hardly anything else, then you have become no different than one who is controlled by his/her desire for food.

(2) Work is good, honorable, and desirable, but when the desire to work is what you eat, drink, and sleep, then you have become a workaholic.

(3) Health is good and desirable, but when your whole life revolves around eating, exercising, or ridding yourself of some weight, then your health is that for which you live, rather than living for Christ.

(4) When you must have good things immediately (right now!), then you are not one who eats in due season as here described of the mature ruler. If a ruler is so controlled by what he wants and desires (even when it is good), he will inevitably make the wrong decisions (like Abraham in seeking the son of promise by his own mere natural means through Hagar, rather than waiting for God to fulfill His promise through His own divinely appointed means through Sarah, Genesis 16).

(5) Dear ones, eating in due season is trust in Christ, knowing that He will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11). Eating in due season is hope in a most wise and powerful God (however long it takes) to bring to pass that for which you have fervently and long prayed. Eating in due season is patience in waiting upon God to make that which is ugly, beautiful in His own time. Eating in due season is persevering in doing that which is right in clinging to Christ and His truth, even when it feels like it would be easier just to let go because you are so tired and exhausted with the battle to overcome a besetting sin in your life. Eating in due season is casting all your care upon Christ, knowing He really does care for you (regardless of the lies of the enemy). Eating in due season is not easy—it is not comfortable. It is hard waiting to see changes in people whom you love and care for so much, and it is hard waiting for a job that will provide for your family. Waiting in general is not easy for any of us, because we want what we want right now! But a mature and noble-minded ruler cannot be controlled by even his desire to eat, but must control even those good and necessary desires, so that he rules not for his appetites or needs, but for the glory of God who can do him no wrong. In fact, this waiting for the due season to eat does not pull the mature ruler away from Christ, but draws him ever closer to Christ. Everything else is temporal and will perish.

(6) Learning to eat in due season is simply learning to be content in all circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13). It is the supernatural grace of God, and yet it is learned in the School of Christ everyday as you grow in trust, love, and hope in Christ, that He orders all things for His glory and for

your good as His dear children. He can do you no wrong. Whether you rule as a parent, husband, boss/supervisor, minister, or elder, are you learning to eat in due season and to be content with what you have received from Christ? If you are not learning this lesson, I can guarantee you that you will make many foolish decisions simply based upon your desires, rather than upon Christ's desires as revealed in His Holy Word.

## **II. The Idleness of Rulers (Ecclesiastes 10:18-19).**

A. A mature and competent ruler is not given to be lazy about his duties. That which is needful to be done is taken seriously, and is endeavored to be done. He does not procrastinate about performing his duties to God or his duties to others. His life does not consist in having fun or in pleasing himself (though enjoying many different activities is a part of his life), but rather his life consists in trusting and loving Christ and in fulfilling his duties to God and to his fellow man. Solomon says (in effect) in Ecclesiastes 10:18 that one who is idle or procrastinates in performing his duties is like one who owns a house, but doesn't repair the leaking roof, which eventually ruins the entire structure of the house until it finally falls apart due to decay. Dear ones, what applies to the material building of a house, all the more applies to the spiritual building of a household or family. When you as rulers (whether parents, husbands, or elders in the church) neglect and procrastinate doing what is necessary to protect the family or the church, when you allow the priorities of others to distract you from the priorities at hand, when your own selfish comforts become more important to you than ministering to your wife, to your children, or to the sheep, the house will certainly decay and be destroyed. How you rulers must constantly examine your own hearts before God in ordering your life in such a way that you seek (by God's grace) to prioritize what needs to be done, rather than to procrastinate concerning what needs to be done. We all wrestle with procrastination (to varying degrees) in doing what we know we should do. You procrastinate for various reasons.

1. You procrastinate in your duties because it is something you don't enjoy, and you would rather do something you do enjoy.

2. You procrastinate in your duties because you feel pressured by a husband, wife, parent, boss/supervisor, or elder to do it; and you proclaim that you want to do your duty, not because you feel pressure from others, but because you desire to do it.

3. You procrastinate in your duties because you grow weary and exhausted physically and spiritually in doing what is good and right, and you simply feel like giving up.

4. You procrastinate in your duties because it will cost you too much (in time, money, and comforts), and you can't sacrifice that person or that thing, even though it is what God calls you to do in His Word.

5. You procrastinate in your duties because you have become so overwhelmed with the cares of this life that you find it nearly impossible to get to all that you need to do.

6. Dear ones, when you procrastinate in your duties, the root of the problem can inevitably be traced to having your priorities out of place. You place your own desires and pleasures ahead of God's desire and pleasures. You place your own work ahead of God's work. You place your own treasures ahead of the treasures of God's Kingdom. You place your own limited strength and resources ahead of the almighty strength and infinite resources of Christ. You place your own short-sighted timetables ahead of God's most wise and holy timetable. Mature rulers must learn (in dependence upon the Lord's wisdom) to prioritize what are the duties (including rest and recreation for the glory of God and for your own good and the good of others) based upon the various circumstances that God brings into your life as to what is most urgent, what will have more serious consequences to oneself or to others if it is delayed, or what is it that can be done that will help you better cope and do a better job with many other pressing situations. When certain things do not get done when you said you intended to get them done, it is not always due to negligence. This is not to make

excuses for gross negligence in choosing to party, rather than in choosing to perform your duty. However, there are times that things you intend to do don't get done due to poor health, due to pressing family needs, due to emergencies that arise, due to prioritizing matters in an order of importance rather than merely in an order of chronology, or due to prioritizing matters in an order that will help you to more effectively get to the many other duties that are on your plate. Let me make it clear that in your prioritizing of ordinary duties each day, that you do not neglect your times of secret worship and family worship (which is to commune with Christ and which is to draw from Christ the understanding and wisdom to be able to prioritize your day in such a way that you will not forget throughout the day that Christ is your life and your reason for living).

B. Solomon states that those rulers who procrastinate in doing their duties because what is most important in life is having fun, indulging their own lusts and pleasures, and pleasing themselves, always seem to find enough money from somewhere to do what they want to do (Ecclesiastes 10:19). They may not have enough money to help those in need. They may not have enough money to financially support the ministry. They may not have enough money to buy what is needful for their wife or children. But they always seem to have enough money to do what they want to do or what pleases them. Herein is displayed the gross selfishness of rulers who procrastinate in performing their duties and most necessary duties.

### **III. The Respect Due to Rulers (Ecclesiastes 10:20).**

A. Solomon concludes this discourse in Ecclesiastes 10:20 with what he began this discourse in Ecclesiastes 10:4: the duty of those being ruled, even when their lawful rulers are sinfully angry or immature is not to rise up in disloyalty or to inspire a mutiny against them, but rather to hold their peace in submission to a lawful (though weak and immature ruler), and to seek to pacify great offenses by working in an orderly manner and in as private of a manner to resolve those offenses.

B. Even a weak ruler may be a lawful ruler, if he seeks to uphold a faithful and Christian constitution (as was a sinful Aaron who made the golden calf, as was David who committed adultery with Bathsheba, as was Solomon who married hundreds of wives and fell into idolatry for a time, and as was Peter who denied the Lord Jesus three times). What was evident in their lives when they sinned against God (even if their repentance was not immediately forthcoming) was a heart to be faithful and obedient to the Lord. It is true that at times rulers will be accused of various sins and errors. The sinful response of children in a family, of members in a faithful church, of subjects in a lawful nation, does not necessarily mean that the parents, elders, or magistrates (though weak sinners saved by God's grace) are unlawful or unfaithful. Such matters must be determined, not by the response of the people under them, but by the truth of Christ revealed in Scripture. Solomon closes this section by calling those who are ruled to keep matters private when they have a problem with a ruler ("for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" to the king). When we gossip about rulers (or anyone else) to others, it always seems that what we said privately gets back to the ruler (or to the person) against who we spoke. Showing respect and honor for lawful rulers by not making public the problems and concerns you have with them (before coming to them) is to show respect for the supreme Ruler, God Himself.

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