

Topic	Use Wisdom but Know Its Limitation
Reference	Ecclesiastes 8
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I am sure we all have stories and personal experiences where we have seen the limitation of wisdom. Numbers of years ago my wife and I decided to take a break from missions that was probably wisdom's limitation for a start and with another couple we went into a little business, a little motel business, tea rooms, looking after people and as you do before you go into business you check things up, don't you. You find out if this is probably going to work or not going to work, what's the climate like, how you are going to leave the four of you in this business and you make your plans. We did all that and we prayed about it too and we all felt that this was what God wanted us to do, but we weren't in the business very long when the government of that day in Australia decided that for the economy of Australia we needed to go into recession. Well that's an example of wisdom's limitation. We didn't know that. We took every help that we could find to get wisdom about what we were deciding but we didn't know what the government was going to do.

Now in this passage in Ecclesiastes chapter 8 we are encouraged to use wisdom but certainly know its limitations. Now you know and I know the wisdom literature especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes gives us many insights into our daily lives, yet wisdom alone cannot solve all that problems. That is clearly illustrated by the life of Solomon, perhaps the wisest man who ever lived. Solomon was not some thinker who shut himself off from the world. On many occasions he used his wisdom to do great works. He did great things. He says of himself, I undertook great projects, I built houses for myself and planted vineyards back in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 verse 4.

The reign of Solomon was the height of Israel's power and glory, but sadly after his Rehoboam came to the throne his lack of wisdom soon resulted in the kingdom of Israel being divided and Solomon's work being undone, perhaps Solomon foresaw this when he said, *I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun because I must leave them to the one who comes after me and who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool. Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun.* Wisdom did not bring Solomon fulfillment, he said for with much wisdom comes much sorrow. The more knowledge, the more grief Ecclesiastes 1:18.

Solomon sought wisdom for himself, trying to find meaning, purpose and fulfillment in his own existence apart from a high reality. His focus was self-centered. His wisdom led him to realize the fleeting nature of life, even though he had much wisdom he knew he was going to die just like everybody else. He says in chapter 2 *Like the fool, the wise man too must die.*

So as a result Solomon was alone without any close personal relationships. We can also experience this if we rely only on earthly wisdom instead of the wisdom that comes from God. Now the Apostle Paul also homes in on the limitations of wisdom when he writes to the church in Corinth, 1-Cor 1:18 he points this out.

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Worldly wisdom is limited by the cross. Now we know that the cross is absolutely essential to the gospel, but the cross places all of us into two distinct categories and every one of us here this morning fit into either/or of those categories.

1. The Perishing

The gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing. You say if you never accept Jesus Christ as your savior and Lord then the cross has no purpose for you, the cross has no value, Jesus may as well not have died on the cross. If you never come to that point in your life where you say, Jesus I believe who you are and I accept you as my Lord and as my savior. Sadly, there are many people who say, okay I can think that perhaps the cross might be important and Jesus might be important in my life but not now, I have got too many things I want to do. Perhaps when I am older, perhaps when I am getting close to the end of my life then I will give my life to Jesus then I will accept what he is saying, how foolish is that. Your life could end suddenly or at the end of your life you may be too sick to even think clearly about accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If that is your wisdom, then it is sadly limited. You need to see Jesus for who He is, the Son of God who willingly laid aside all his rights and privileges to be born into this world and then willingly lay his life down in being crucified to pay the price for your sin and mine. From a worldly point of view this is out of foolishness but only God could step in to bring salvation to mankind, there was no other way.

One of the recent responses from a listener to GMTA in India also demonstrates the limitation of worldly limitation. This is what he wrote.

I am a Hindu priest from Uttar Pradesh. Our village has very little regular electricity. we can install the solar panel. My son works in a nearby town. One month ago he bought a TV. Every day we watch devotional programs on that channel in the morning and then I go to work. That morning which was Easter when we were watching we saw your program and we came to know about this god Jesus that he went to the cross for my sin as a sacrifice and rose on the third day. So I write to you to send me more about this god, send me a picture I will put with the other gods.

Now that is sad, so many in India see Jesus as just another God. Almost 50% of India's population have never heard the gospel.

2. The Saved

To those who have accepted Christ as Savior and Lord the gospel is the power of God. If you are being saved by the blood of Christ then you have come to believe that the message of the cross expresses the very power of God, you are no longer perishing but you are saved and set apart for God's glory and for eternity.

In Solomon's quest to live a meaningful life he addresses the use of wisdom but he is also very aware of its limitations. There is a story

Helmuth von Moltke was drafted to work in counter intelligence for Nazi Germany. His Christian faith made him a staunch opponent of Adolph Hitler. Helmuth von Moltke believed it was wrong for him to use violent force against the Nazis but nevertheless he used his high position to rescue many prisoners from certain death. Not surprisingly he was eventually accused of treason, put on trial, found guilty and sentenced to die. In his final letter home to his wife he described the dramatic moment at the trial when the judge launched into a tirade against his Christian faith. Only in one respect does national socialism resemble Christianity the judge shouted, we also demand the whole man and the judge asked him to declare his ultimate loyalty. From whom do you take your orders, from the other world or from Adolph Hitler. Where lie your loyalty and faith? Helmuth von Moltke knew exactly where his loyalty lay. He put all his hope and trust in Jesus Christ there he stood before his earthly judge as a Christian and nothing else. His faith had enabled him to act wisely in government service and now it enabled him to act wisely when he faced his final hour. As a believer in Christ Helmuth von Moltke understood the difference between the proper exercise of authority and the abuse of power. He also knew the wise course of action when he was under someone else's control and in danger of his very life.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 8 Solomon considered the matter of submission to authority. He was aware that God set up kings and authorities and he discussed how people are to relate to civil authorities. Right throughout history God has used people whether they are Christians or not, to fulfill his purpose and Solomon is very much aware of that fact. In different countries and cultures this can be a very difficult issue. How do you respond to absolute corruption and evil government and leaders?

I am an outsider and I don't live in your country. I can't possibly understand what it really is like and whether it is wisdom or wisdom's limitation I am going to leave the final points of how you respond to authority in your country to your own leaders. I don't think it is right for me as an outsider to lecture you on what you should do. May be that is wisdom's limitation.

However, I do want to share with you the basis of God's instructions as Solomon wrote them here. The teacher's instructions are based on wisdom and so in verse 1 he exalts the wise man and the wisdom he possess. The preacher asked in verse 1 *who is like the wise and who knows*

the interpretation of a thing. One could also read the verses follows, who is as blessed as the wise man and who knows the explanation of a thing.

A wise person understanding on things which we reflected in his face Solomon goes onto say. That is what the preacher says in verse 1 also.

A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

If we think of Daniel, he was led in Babylonian captivity as a young teenager. Eventually because of his wisdom he was selected to receive special training but Daniel and his friends were wise and requested that they not eat the king's food which have most likely being offered to other gods. At the end of 10 days it was seen that they were better in appearance then all those who eat the king's food. Now it is strange but true, Godly wisdom makes a difference even in the way people look.

A prominent atheist, his name was Matthew Parris wrote in 2008 an essay about a strange phenomenon that he absorbed in Africa and it is amazing. As an atheist he wrote an essay for the Times edited 'Why Africa Needs God?' He made it clear that he does not believe in God at all he admitted that Christianity made a tangible difference in the lives of people he knew in his boyhood home of Malawi and in other countries across Africa. Not only did he admired the good work that Christians were doing to care for the poor and sick but he also liked the way they looked. He said the Christians were different. Their faith appeared to have liberated and relax them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity and engagement in the world, whenever we entered a territory worked by missionaries we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to. Something in their eyes. He is an atheist and he sees the difference that God can make and yet he is still an atheist for the time being anyway.

Biblical wisdom does bring personal transformation. The passage also teaches us that although we should use wisdom to survive in the world, wisdom has limitations. It doesn't enable us to know all the work of God. We have to live with our limitations, we simply cannot understand everything that God does. There was a write up in Our Daily Bread that said this.

The universe is astonishingly grand. Right now the moon is spinning around us at nearly 2,300 miles an hour. Our Earth is spinning around the sun at 66,000 miles an hour. Our sun is one of 200 billion other stars and trillions more planets in our galaxy, and that galaxy is just one of 100 billion others hurtling through space. Astounding!

Do we understand all that God is doing, no. We can't possibly it is way beyond us. In comparison to this vast cosmos our little earth is no bigger than a pebble and in our individual lives no greater than a grain of sand. Yet according to scripture the God of the galaxies attends to each microscopic one of us in intimate detail. We can't possibly know all there is to know about God and the works of God, it is way beyond us.

So as believers we must use our God given wisdom in this life, we must also accept the fact that life on earth sometimes presents us with mysteries that we cannot fathom. Solomon was unwilling to make sacrifices necessary to live the way that brings happiness in life. In the New Testament Jesus told a way of life based on a value higher than wisdom. The value of love. Jesus taught that two great keys to spiritual well-being are to love God and to love fellow humans. Paul wrote

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge but have not love I am nothing.

The hope of all who follow Christ is not in this life. No one who is overly concerned with his life can achieve lasting happiness and that was Solomon's mistake. That is the limit of wisdom of practical advice regarding this life. Jesus told all of his followers that the hope of all who follow Christ is not in this life, no one who is overly concerned with this life can achieve lasting happiness and that was Solomon's mistake. Jesus said, *therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body what you will wear. See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin, yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.*

As followers of Christ we must look beyond the concerns of life to eternal life and happiness in the kingdom of God. We need to acknowledge that our human wisdom is so limited, true wisdom comes from God alone.

In the below story human wisdom would have said, give up, quit but for the Christian this is not an option. Obedience is what Christ requires from us.

In 1968, the place was Mexico City, the closing ceremonies of the Mexico's city Olympic games have just finished. The spectators were picking up their belonging and preparing to leave. When the PA asked them to remain in their seats, outside the stadium the sounds of police sirens could be heard and the flash of blue lights seen encircling someone making his way towards the stadium. The man was John Stephen Akhwari, a marathon runner from Tunisia, Africa. The last marathon runner had entered Olympic stadium hours earlier before the closing ceremonies. The medals had already been awarded. Why then was John Stephen Akhwari so late? As Akhwari entered the stadium the confused spectators soon realized he was covered with blood. He taken a terrible fall early in the race, wacked his head on the pavement, seriously damaged his knee and endured a trampling by other runners before he could get back up on his feet. The crowd rose to their feet and began cheering as the injured runner ran in through the stadium. When John Akhwari crossed the finishing line the crowd led out a thunderous roar. Akhwari was quickly rushed off to hospital to be treated for his injuries and severe dehydration. The next day John Akhwari was interviewed by a sports journalist. The first question the journalist asked, why after sustaining the kinds of injuries you did would you ever get up and proceed to the finishing

line when there is no way you could possibly win the race. Akhwari said, *my country did not send me over 11,000 kilometers to start a race but to not finish one.*

The analogy is obvious, Christ has not called you and me to start a race. He has called us to finish it and we don't understand all the implications involved in the race and what's along the way because of our human limitations but God nonetheless calls us to a life of obedience, to trust him no matter what we don't understand, no matter where we are at or whatever happens to us, he calls us to a life of obedience.

Apostle Paul could say in Philippians 3:

Forgetting what is behind, all of my failures, all of my shortcomings, all of the things that have made me just fall short of what God requires, forgetting all those things, I press on to the goal to win the prize for which Christ is calling me heaven and earth in Christ Jesus.