Law Abiding Citizens
Ecclesiastes 8:1-9 (NKJV)

For those of you who are visiting with us on this Homecoming Sunday, we have been in a series of messages from the Book of Ecclesiastes entitled: “Finding Meaning In A Meaningless World.”

Today as we continue with our series, I would ask that you please turn with me in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter eight. And let’s read verses 1-9.

**ECCLESIASTES 8:1-9 (NKJV)**

1 Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing?
   A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.

2 I say, “Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God.

3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him.”

4 Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say to him, “What are you doing?”

5 He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; and a wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment,

6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man increases greatly.

7 For he does not know what will happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?

8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

9 All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.
**INTRODUCTION**

**ILLUSTRATION:** In America, our lives are governed by hundreds of LAWS on the Federal, State and Local levels. And to be honest, there are some LAWS still in existence that are OUTDATED and even DOWNRIGHT RIDICULOUS.

For Example:

- In **ALABAMA** it is against the law to wear a fake mustache in Church that will cause people to laugh.

- In **TENNESSEE** it is against the law to shoot any wild animals from a moving vehicle other than whales. (I hear they have a real problem with whales in Tennessee)

- In **ZION, ILLINOIS** it is against the law to teach your pets how to smoke cigars.

- In **GARY, INDIANA** it is against the law to go watch a movie at a movie theater within four hours after eating garlic or an onion. (Sounds like a good law to me, how about you.)

- Did you know in **MYRTLE CREEK, OREGON** it is against the law to box with a kangaroo?

- In **CALIFORNIA** it is against the law to set a mousetrap without a valid hunting license.

- In **MISSOURI** it is against the law to drive on the highway with a live bear in the car with you.

- In **OKLAHOMA** it is against the law to make ugly faces at dogs.

- In **IDAHO** it is against the law for a man to give a woman a box of chocolates weighing LESS than fifty pounds. (Can I get an AMEN from all you ladies?)
Obviously, it is hard to take any of these ridiculous laws seriously. But in today's scripture text, Solomon teaches us how important it is for us to be **LAW ABIDING CITIZENS**. And as we will see, our obedience to the LAW is actually one way we show honor to GOD.

You notice Solomon begins this eighth chapter with a question:

**“Who Is Like A Wise Man?”**

When we think of “a wise man” perhaps images come to mind of an elderly grandfather sitting in a rocking chair passing along advice to his grandson. Or perhaps you think of the bearded **Obi-Wan Kenobi** character in Star Wars dressed in his long, hooded robe.

When Solomon asks, **“Who is like a wise man?”** he is not saying there is no one who is wise, but rather it is very rare to find those who possess true wisdom here on earth.

Life in this world can be very difficult to navigate. We will face many obstacles and challenges along our journey. We will be confronted with some very tough decisions and we will have lots of hard problems to solve. And it takes a whole lot of wisdom to make this journey through life.

**But “who possesses that kind of wisdom?”** Its not the man or woman with the most education or the highest I.Q. But rather it is the man or woman who **lives by the wisdom of GOD**.

Do you realize that as a child of GOD you possess a wisdom most of the people in this world do not possess. You have **God's Instruction Manual on “How To Live Here and How To Live Eternally.”** And that makes you wiser than the vast majority of people in the world.
And the more you read God's Instructions.......and study God's instructions.......and live by God's instructions.......the wiser you become!

Biblical wisdom helps us be better husbands, and better wives, and better friends, and better employees, and better citizens.


Although Paris made it very clear in the article that he himself is an atheist and does not believe in GOD, he admitted that Christianity had made a remarkable difference in the lives of the people he grew up with in his native Malawi, Africa, as well as other countries he visited in Africa.

He said, “The Christians were different than others. Not only did they care for the poor, there was a liveliness, a curiosity, and an engagement with the world around them. Whenever we entered a territory where Christian Missionaries had worked, we had to acknowledge that something had changed in the faces of the Christians. There was something in their eyes.”

I wonder if people here in America see that in you and me? Do they look at us and see that we have been transformed by the power of GOD? Do they see a remarkable difference in us? Can they see something in our faces and in our eyes that says, “these people have something we don’t have,” “these people know something we don’t know?” These people have a “confidence and assurance” that is missing in our lives?

Oh brothers and sisters, as Christians you and I ought to be “the cream of the crop” in America. We ought to be the very best citizens this country has to offer.

The question is: **How Do We Do It?** We do it by being **LAW ABIDING CITIZENS.** In these verses, Solomon gives us two reasons why we should obey the laws of the land.
First of all, Solomon tells us……

I. When We Obey The Law We Honor God (vs. 2-4)

2 I say, “Keep the king’s commandment for the sake of your oath to God.

3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him.”

4 Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say to him, “What are you doing?”

1. From the time you and I were born into this world, we have been under the God-given authority of someone else.

   - As children, we were under the authority of our parents.

   - In school, we were under the authority of our teachers and principal.

   - If you played sports, you were under the authority of your coach or coaches.

   - As an employee, you are under the authority of your boss or supervisor.

   - In the Church, we are under the authority of the scriptures and the elders who have been given authority by GOD HIMSELF in the scriptures.

   - And as citizens, we are under the authority of our government, as well as the authority of law enforcement officers.
2. It is the latter that Solomon addresses in these verses; our submission to the governing authorities of the land.

3. Notice in verse 2 Solomon says, “*Keep the king's command.*” Now, if you are like me, this command may wipe the smile right off your face, especially in light of who happens to be our “current king.”

But we must understand that GOD is commanding us to show respect for the office, even if we have no respect for the man who holds that office.

4. It is very important to note that our obedience is not for the sake of the king or the president, but rather it is for the sake of the One who placed the king upon the throne.

   DANIEL 2:21 (NKJV) And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings;

5. When you and I live as law abiding citizens we bring glory and honor to GOD, because we have ultimately submitted to His authority over us.

6. We find this teaching throughout the scriptures. Jesus told His disciples to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's”

   In Romans 13:1 the apostle Paul writes: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that the authorities that exist are appointed by GOD.”
7. Now the question that I'm sure is on your mind is whether or not our obedience to governing authorities has any limits, or are we to always obey the laws of the land regardless.

8. The apostle Peter answers that for us in Acts 5. Peter and the other apostles had been arrested for preaching the gospel at the Temple and brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin. The High Priest ordered Peter and the other apostles to never preach or teach about Christ again, or to even mention the name of Jesus in Jerusalem.

What was Peter's response? “We must obey GOD rather than men.”

9. When it comes to a conflict between God's Laws and man's laws we must obey GOD as the higher authority.

**ILLUSTRATION**

We have had a prime illustration of this recently in the news. Kim Davis, the Clerk of Court in Rowan County Kentucky Rowan was recently put in jail for refusing to issue marriage licenses to gay couples. Her reason for not doing so was very simple: Homosexual relationships are called an “abomination” in the Bible and thus violate the law of GOD.

When faced with a decision to obey the highest law in our land and the highest law in the universe, Kim Davis chose to obey GOD’S LAW.
10. Will there ever come a time when we may be faced with choosing between the law of man and the law of GOD? I believe it is very possible, and even probable.

Under NO CIRCUMSTANCE whatsoever is GOD ever honored when we obey a law of man that violates His divine law.

11. May we resolve to honor GOD with our obedience to the laws of the land as long as those laws don't violate His laws.

In verse 5 Solomon gives us a second reason to be LAW ABIDING CITIZENS and that is......

II. When We Obey The Law We Stay Out of Trouble (v.5)

5 He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; and a wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment,

1. Obedience to the law has God's blessing. And submitting to the law of the land will help us stay out of a whole lot of trouble.

ILLUSTRATION

Back in the late 1980's when I first started preaching at Wilkinson Church of Christ, Linda and I lived in Greenville and drove to Pantego every Sunday.

One Sunday night while we were going back to Greenville, I got pulled over by a State Trooper near the Woodard's Pond Church of Christ. The Trooper gave me a ticket for driving 68 in a 55 mph speed zone.
Not only was I embarrassed for getting pulled right by one of our Churches of Christ. I was ashamed that I had broken the law in front of our son Seth. And I was ashamed that I had to appear in court and pay my speeding ticket. And I was especially embarrassed when my name appeared in the court section of the Washington Daily News as a “lawbreaker.”

That experience taught me a very valuable lesson and that was, I **don't want to have to ever go through this again**. And so I clipped my name out of the court section along with the information about my violation and I taped it on the dash by the speedometer to remind me not to speed again.

2. This is where that **wisdom** comes in that I was talking about earlier. If you and I will choose wisely to obey the laws of the land, we can spare ourselves a whole lot of trouble and life will be easier.

   - When you drive the speed limit, you don’t have to worry about speed traps.

   - When you pay your taxes, you aren’t particularly worried about an IRS audit.

   - When you faithfully do your job each day, you don’t have to be afraid you’re going to get fired.

   - When you make your payments on time you don’t have to worry they are going to come take your home or your automobile away from you.

3. Now certainly there are some exceptions. For example when people defraud insurance companies, guess who pays for it? Us law-abiding citizens.

   When people shoplift in the stores, we all suffer for it by having to pay higher prices.
When people choose to drink and drive, a lot of times law-abiding citizens wind up getting injured or killed.

When criminals get sent off to prison for life, us law-abiding citizens foot the bill for their care.

4. But what Solomon is telling us, is that as a rule, you and I spare ourselves a whole lot of trouble by simply obeying the laws of the land.

CONCLUSION

Archibald Rutledge once wrote about a man he met one day whose dog had just been killed in a forest fire.

The heartbroken man explained to Rutledge how it happened. Because he worked outside every day he often took his dog with him. That morning he had left the animal in a clearing and gave him the command to stay and watch his lunch bucket while he went off into the forest to work.

His faithful dog understood, and obeyed what his master told him to do. Then a fire started in the woods and the blaze quickly spread to where the dog had been left. But the dog would not move. He stayed right where he was in perfect obedience to his master's command.

With tear-filled eyes, the dog-owner told Rutledge, “I had to always be very careful what I told him to do, because I knew he would faithfully obey my every command. “

Brothers and sisters, our heavenly Father has commanded us to obey the laws of our land, so long as those laws don't conflict with His divine laws.

Let us honor GOD by our faithful obedience to do as He has commanded us to do.