

Ecclesiastes 8:11-13

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-8/ecclesiastes-811-13/>

Regardless of appearance, evil actions will eventually lead to an evil end. But it will be well for those who fear God.

Solomon now moves from an observation about a *wicked* ruler that abuses his authority to a ruler who fails to use his authority appropriately. Abusive rulers are *wicked*. But a ruler that fails to swiftly punish *an evil deed* also does wickedly. The reason is because the lack of consequences for misbehavior causes *the hearts of the sons of men among them* to be *given fully to do evil*.

Next Solomon moves from observation about the appropriate use of authority to an observation regarding consequences for behavior. He acknowledges that sometimes a *sinner* who *does evil a hundred times* might gain an apparent benefit from his actions. Solomon uses the phrase *lengthen his life* to represent blessing, since a long life is a desirable blessing.

Even so, Solomon asserts that *still I know it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly*. Although a wicked man might appear to gain benefits from his *evil deeds*, it will eventually catch up with him. Solomon says the *sinner* who *does evil will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God*. Solomon seems to contrast the *sinner* whose *evil deeds lengthen his life* with the preferred result of a life that has been lengthened *like a shadow*. Why is a life that has been lengthened *like a shadow* superior to a *life* that has been merely lengthened?

As the day progresses, shadows lengthen. They lengthen predictably and gradually. They lengthen consistently, all the way until sunset. Only then are they no more. Perhaps what Solomon has in mind is the tendency for *evil* to create abrupt endings. *Evil breeds evil*.

This phrase can also be translated “nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow.” In contrast to the person who fears God, the *sinner* “*may lengthen his life*,” meaning exist for longer, but his days will be as a shadow. A shadow merely represents the shape of something that is real. Solomon might be telling us that although *evil deeds* might bring someone a long number of days, it will only be a *shadow* of the life God intends for us. It will not bring fulfillment.

There is a parallel between the *sinner* who *does evil a hundred times* and the *wicked* ruler who abuses his authority. Each serves themselves. They put their own appetites ahead of seeking benefit for others. The Bible is clear that this is our natural bent. Jesus stated that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves ([Lev 19:18](#); [Matt 22:39](#)). The underlying assumption in this statement is that we already love ourselves. The path to learning to obey this command to love others as we love ourselves is through the first command, to love God. And this begins by the *fear* of God.

Solomon makes it clear that the way to *lengthen* our *days like a shadow* is to *fear God*. This infers that the path to our greatest self-interest is to seek the welfare of others. When we obey God and seek to love others as we love ourselves, we actually *lengthen* our *days like a shadow*. This is a great irony, that in seeking others we actually pursue our own best interest. But it is at the core of this wisdom Solomon encourages us to live.

Solomon shows here a major conclusion in Ecclesiastes. He says it *will be well* for those who *fear God*. The word for *fear* is the same word found in [Genesis 3:10](#), when Adam and Eve are aware of their nakedness and are frightened that the Lord will see them. These powerful, but mysterious, promises—*be well, fear God*—are paradoxical. It requires faith to believe our best interest lies in setting aside self. It is a mystery, a vapor, but it is the life God has designed for us. Fighting against it is madness; accepting reality for what it is and choosing to trust God is the path to meaning.

It requires courage to *fear God*. The phrase translated *fear him openly* literally means “fear him before faces.” Not just in our closet at home or behind private thoughts, but *openly*, in full view of others. To *fear him* is to maintain faith in God and submit to His ways, thereby emboldened to live out faith publicly.

Biblical Text:

¹¹ **Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.** ¹² **Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.** ¹³ **But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.**