

Eccl. 7:1 ¶ A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

As I read through this chapter, it seems to take on more of the flavor of the book of Proverbs. Solomon seems to be thinking about the better things associated with life on this earth. He begins by making a comparison of things that are both good, but then determines that one is better than the other—a good name and precious ointment.

His conclusion is that a good name or reputation is a very valuable asset. When he referenced it as better than precious ointment, I couldn't help but think of the story of Mary using the expensive ointment of spikenard to anoint Jesus' feet (see John 12). Why would Solomon conclude that a good reputation is more valuable than the ointment/perfume? I think the most obvious reason is that the one only gives temporary benefit, while the other is of long-lasting benefit. Also of note is the truth that a good name is something to which every person—rich or poor—can aspire.

His next observation is that the day you die is better than the day of your birth. This conclusion fits right in with his observations made in the previous chapters regarding the vanity of life. At birth your life is a clean slate—unmarred by experience either good or bad. As one grows, he experiences life and its frustrations. When you die, you are relieved of those frustrations. This is obviously reasoning from a physical perspective of life.

As a Christian, I agree with Solomon's conclusion; but that is because I know that death will usher in an even better life full of blessings beyond my ability to even imagine.

Isaiah 64:4 "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him."

Eccl. 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Why would Solomon conclude that it is more beneficial for one to spend time with mourners rather than those who are partying? The man confronted with death is more focused on the serious realities of life than the man who is making merry and enjoying an escape from the cares of life. He realizes the importance of living life in light of coming death. From that perspective one is more likely to make wiser decisions in life. Maybe he was actually thinking with a spiritual perspective with this statement, since only the idea that there is spiritual accountability after death is an effective motivation for choosing to temper one's lifestyle and live within godly parameters.

Eccl. 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

This proverb is closely related to the previous one. Experiencing sorrow causes one to think soberly and seriously about life. Again I think that Solomon is probably thinking from a spiritual perspective; if death is just annihilation, there is no motivation to choosing temperance. Scripture is clear in stating that godly sorrow is to our benefit.

2 Corinthians 7:10 *“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”*

2 Corinthians 4:17 *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory....”*

Romans 5:3-5 *“...but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”*

I think it is important to note that laughter is not bad; it is good.

Proverbs 17:22 *“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine....”*

It's just that the eternal spiritual benefits produced by sorrow are far greater.

Eccl. 7:4-6 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

These verses give further commentary on the previous two verses. A wise person is one who looks at life seriously and realistically. He understands that rebuke or reproof from another wise person is of great benefit. This time the comparison is made in direct contrast. In other words, there is no benefit to listening to entertainment that is brainless, imprudent, indiscreet or contemptible (all synonyms of foolish); in fact, Webster defines a *fool* as one who “acts contrary to moral and religious wisdom; a wicked person.” The point being made in verse 6 is that the laughter of the fool is as short-lived as thorns in the fire heating a pot.

This truth will not be well embraced in the culture of America today. There is very little in the area of entertainment that does not fall in the category of foolish.

Eccl. 7:7 ¶ Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

When I looked at the Hebrew, I felt like the NIV expressed this truth best: *Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.*

This truth directly connects to the definition of a fool as stated in the previous verse. I'm sad to note that it's a truth that is in evidence in our justice system today.

God had specifically instructed His people to make righteous judgments and avoid taking bribes, and that command is still valid today.

Deuteronomy 16:19 "Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous."

Eccl. 7:8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

I agree with Solomon; it is always fun and energizing to start a project, but it is even better to complete that project and enjoy the benefits of the finished product. As I continued to think on this verse, it occurred to me that the last half is being stated in direct reference to the first half. One who is willing to work with patience and perseverance will achieve a better result than one who is overconfident and presumptuous or rash (from Webster's definition of *proud*).

Eccl. 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

This is another very powerful truth in light of the culture in America today. We live in a time when the mantra of the day is, "It's all about me." Road rage is not uncommon, and the fear of someone going "postal" at the workplace is legitimate. Anger is poison to the spirit and will manifest itself in evil action if allowed to fester.

Psalms 37:8 "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil."

Proverbs 29:22 "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression."

Ephesians 4:26-27 "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil."

Eccl. 7:10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.

Solomon is basically stating his opinion that it is not wise to spend much time reflecting on the good old days in light of today. Why would he say that? I think because the past cannot be changed, and our focus should be on the present and what we can do to make it and ourselves better.

Hebrews 3:13 "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

The Apostle Paul states it this way: *Philippians 3:13-14* "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are**

behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Eccl. 7:11-12 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.

In these verses Solomon is declaring that to possess both wisdom and money gives us an advantage. The knowledge that gives us wisdom, however, is more valuable because it gives life. How is that? Because true wisdom is rooted in the Word of God in which we find the words of eternal life.

2 Peter 1:2-3 "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:"

Colossians 2:2-3 "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Money is only an advantage in this present life; the benefit of possessing true wisdom is eternal.

Eccl. 7:13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?

This is basically a statement of the power and authority of God. No other being in the creation can thwart His will.

Isaiah 14:24 "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:"

Deuteronomy 3:24 "O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?"

Deuteronomy 4:35 "Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him."

Eccl. 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

Solomon seems to be saying that we should enjoy the times in our life that are filled with blessing and prosperity; however, when experiencing the troubles that will come with life on this earth, we should remember that God is sovereign over all.

The difficult part for me was understanding the last part of the verse. JFB indicated that this was reference to not being able to cast blame on God for our circumstances. Though God is sovereign, He doesn't limit us from experiencing the consequences of sin in this world. Some of our bad times (e.g., disease and natural disasters) are a natural result of the impact of sin on creation. The important difference for the child of God is that every experience that touches us is Father-filtered; it has been caused or allowed for good in accordance with God's purposes.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Adam Clarke expressed the thought that the bad times are necessary to balance out the good times so that we don't forget God. It is sad but true that troubled times seem to provide soil more conducive to spiritual growth than do the good times.

Romans 5:3-4 "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope:"

Eccl. 7:15-18 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness. Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

These verses declare a very troubling truth to many of us; often the good die young and the wicked live long and prosper.

I liked Ray Stedman's thoughts on this verse. This seems to be Solomon's way of saying, "Moderation in all things." On verse 16 he states: "The second verb of Verse 16, "Do not make yourself overwise," is the key to understanding the verse. In grammar this is called a reflexive verb; that is why the word yourself is included there. What the Searcher is really saying is, "Do not be wise to yourself; do not be wise in your own eyes, in regard to your righteousness." He goes on to state that self-righteousness is usually based on what a person doesn't do, but I think it would also include the things they do. The Pharisees of Jesus' day are a great example of its truth. That person is more concentrated on pleasing self than God. That type of pride is a sin just as despised by God as wicked actions. Both types of sin lead to His judgment.

Solomon's conclusion is that one should live one's life in light of this truth. The most important truth in the end is that the one that fears God finds life after death in the presence of God.

1 John 2:17 "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; **that where I am, there ye may be also.**"

Eccl. 7:19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.

I think the CJB gives the better insight: "To a wise man wisdom is better protection than ten rulers in a city." The Hebrew, however, seems to me to be referencing strong men, not rulers. We have already discussed that those who are truly wise have put their faith in God. So my version would be: One man with the ability to seek God's wisdom in making plans and preparations for defense is far more important to the protection of a city than ten men of brute strength.

Eccl. 7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

This verse is the Old Testament match to *Romans 3:12*: "...there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Every person born since the fall of man into sin is born a sinner. The only exception to this truth is the man Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born without the sin nature inherited by the descendants of Adam; and He lived a sinless life.

Hebrews 4:14-15 "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Eccl. 7:21-22 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

This is simply a caution to choosing to eavesdrop on other people's conversations. It is always possible that you will hear something negative about yourself. I doubt there is anyone who can honestly say that they haven't spoken words in private that they have later regretted. Truth is—It doesn't matter if anyone else is around to hear your wicked thoughts, because God knows all our thoughts and our words before we even speak them. That should be deterrent enough for every child of God.

Psalms 139:4 "For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether."

Eccl. 7:23-25 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:

At this point Solomon declares that he has proven all his conclusions through his own wisdom—and therein lies the problem. True wisdom comes from God.

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."

James 1:5 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

No matter how much effort and time one invests in attaining wisdom, those efforts will be fruitless and the time spent in vain without seeking God's help in the process.

Frankly, it shouldn't take special revelation from God to recognize actions that are wicked and foolish; but apart from the truth of the word of God, there can be no right standard for judgment.

Eccl. 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

Solomon should certainly have been an expert in this area considering the number of wives and concubines he had. I wonder how many of those unions resulted in trouble and sorrow; my guess is—many, if not most, of them. Solomon is right—A man who chooses to please God will escape the woman who is out to seduce him for her own purposes. That is because it is God's plan for there to be one man and one woman united in marriage for life and sex outside of marriage is forbidden. It is also God's will that the marriage be one of an equal yoke—child of God to child of God.

Matthew 19:4-6 "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Exodus 20:14 "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

2 Corinthians 6:14 *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”*

Eccl. 7:27-29 Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, *counting one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

According to Solomon, there might be one upright man in one thousand, but not one upright woman. It's interesting that he chose the number 1000 since we know that he had 1000 wives and concubines.

We're all sinners, but from a human perspective I think this is quite a chauvinistic statement. I'm sure it was true from his own experience, but how can one who knows nothing about a committed relationship expect to have any contact with an upright woman. All upright women would run from his presence.

I agree wholeheartedly with Solomon that God created man in righteousness. It didn't take long, however, for man to rebel against God and turn to his own "wisdom." Since that time, man's ability to find more and more ways to sin against God and his fellowman has proven relentless and horrifying.