**Ecclesiastes**

**Chapter 7**

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**Ecc 7:1-4**

*A good name is better than a good ointment, And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. (2) It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart. (3) Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy. (4) The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.*

Solomon follows the popular proverb that everyone understands: a good name is better than a good ointment with an apparent contradiction involving death. Christians can certainly echo the second proverb about death for we are going to a better place. The “day of one’s birth” may be meant to contrast the happiness of a birthday party with the sobriety of a funeral. The day of one’s birth was an entrance into an unknown time period when we will suffer many times of pain. We will see our loved ones die and be left without them. We will become ill with severe illnesses. We will then enter a time when our bodies are giving out and we are dying which can be a time of considerable pain and sorrow. But the Christian’s actual death is a time of great joy as he will enter an eternity of being with his Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and many other disciples of Jesus Christ. There will be no more pain and sorrow forever.

* 2Cor 4:16-18 *Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. (17) For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, (18) while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*
* Phil 1:21 *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

Of course Solomon could not understand death as do those who live after the resurrection of Christ.

Verses 2-4 make a simple point that much is to be gained by a sober reflection on death which allows a person to understand that the same end awaits him. Soberly thinking about approaching death helps a person to better plan his life so he can take this realization to heart and make more informed decisions. People can then reflect on how they are living and what people would say about them at their funeral. We should be ambitious to glorify God while we live.

2Cor 5:9-10 *Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

Sorrow in the house of mourning can then be commendable and useful as compared to the laughter in the house of feasting where people are likely to be minimizing a concept of death and religion and maximizing carnal mirth with vain and useless conversation and impure songs. The sadness caused by proper reflections on worldly things can help to bring the heart to confess its faults and bring it away from vain and sensual things to be engaged in thinking about spiritual and heavenly things. Thus a face signifying the contemplations of events that lead to unwise actions can bring about a heart that is happy and pleased with its new directions. Thus the wise person will go to the house of mourning so he focusses on the useful subjects of the mortality of human nature and future judgment. Certainly the heart of the fool remains in the house of pleasure where the focus is on the folly of the world with merry songs and all is frivolous with no thoughts about his future death that will bring all such things to an end.

**Ecc 7:5-6**

*It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man Than for one to listen to the song of fools. (6) For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool; And this too is futility.*

Listening to the rebuke of a wise man may bring about temporary sadness and pain as he brings proper judgment upon worldly actions. The song of fools will praise such worldly actions and tickle the ears of a worldly person but this is praise of very temporary things. The wise man will force a person to think properly of the future judgments and to bring his focus away from the worldly onto the spiritual. Thorns are for starting a fire to bring a pot to a boil and then they are gone. Similarly the laughter of the fool is only short lived and reflects his focus on the meaningless things of the world. The fool is thus worthless and about to be destroyed. Certainly listening to such is spending time with futility.

**Ecc 7:7-9**

*For oppression makes a wise man mad, And a bribe corrupts the heart. (8) The end of a matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. (9) Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.*

He now speaks of politics and how the world pollutes what could be helpful. Certainly a wise man will be emotionally distressed when he sees oppression of people by those in political power. However, he may become rash and say unadvised things concerning the situation. Bribes can distort justice by causing a judge to bring about wrong judgments by perverting their conclusion. A good thing or person will have a better ending than a beginning if the proper actions are taken during its existence. Certainly this was true of Job and of those whom the Lord helps:

* Job 8:7 *"Though your beginning was insignificant, Yet your end will increase greatly.*
* Psa 37:37-40 *Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity. (38) But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off. (39) But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble. (40) The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.*

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit of God and certainly is of great use in the Christian’s life. Those who are proud and elated with themselves and all that they have are an abomination to Him:

Luke 16:15 *And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.*

If we think too highly of ourselves we may fail in some effort and then get angry if we don’t realize the fault is within rather than without. Also if we become too easily grief stricken over corruption in the world then we can become bitter and show anger about a situation over which we have no control. The wise man is neither cynical nor embittered. Christians should rest in the knowledge that God is sovereign over all events.

**Ecc 7:10-14**

*Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this. (11) Wisdom along with an inheritance is good And an advantage to those who see the sun. (12) For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors. (13) Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent? (14) In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him.*

Certainly the good old days only may seem to be better than what exists now. Corruption has always existed and we should not look at the past through “rose colored glasses”. Every time period has its hardships and opportunities and wisdom helps us to look at the past properly when judging the present. Certainly having wisdom and an inheritance is good and is an advantage to those living in the world. Both wisdom and money can be protections from the evil of the world. Knowing that God is sovereign is wisdom and will protect the lives of those who have this understanding. Christians know that the knowledge of Jesus Christ can lead to eternal life:

* John 17:3 *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*
* 2Pe 1:2-3 *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; (3) seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.*

We know spiritual wisdom is Solomon’s meaning when we read verses 13 and 14. God’s works cannot be undone by man and the person who understands this has a wisdom that allows him to better function in the world. God makes days of prosperity and days of adversity so we cannot modify them except to accept them as coming from Him. Since God is sovereign we cannot predict the future. We do not know when adversity or prosperity will come upon us for nothing is permanent and we cannot predict changes. The stock market’s rise or fall cannot be predicted for we do not know all aspects of what is happening in the world and how God views the events.

Lam 3:38 *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?*

**Ecc 7:15-18**

*I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. (16) Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? (17) Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time? (18) It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.*

Solomon states that he has observed both ends of the spectrum of people during his lifetime of futility. He has seen the righteous perish while remaining in a state of righteousness and he has seen the wicked man live a long life while remaining wicked. Thus he sees no difference in length of life with being righteous or wicked. He then warns his readers to avoid both extremes! He is saying not to be a fanatic for he seems to think that both extremes will ruin a person. He then particularly warns against being excessively wicked and a fool. He seems to think that being both excessively wicked and a fool can result in an early death. A wicked lifestyle can lead to diseases that bring about death. It seems he is saying that some sin will be in everyone’s life but those who embrace evil as a way of life are destroyed by it. Verse 18 is stating that it is good to be devoted to God and the teachings of wisdom and to enjoy the good things of life. He states that the God-fearer maintains both during his life. The ascetic considers every form of indulgence or mirth as sin or folly and the libertine thinks any restraint is a threat to his pleasure-seeking. Solomon teaches that one should combine the fear of God with true enjoyment of the good things of life.

**Ecc 7:19-22**

*Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. (20) Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. (21) Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you. (22) For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.*

Solomon warns the reader that there is not even one person on earth who is righteous to the extent that he always does good and never sins. Paul also commented on this fact: Rom 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. Because of this, even having ten rulers in a city will not control the population from evil. Thus it is better that everyone have wisdom so that each individual will have the ability to control himself. The reader needs to recognize this so that he can deal with people as they are. Foolish words can come from the best of men. Since people are basically evil, if you listen you will even hear your servant cursing you. So don’t take too seriously what you hear people say since their pettiness and weakness can bring forth evil words and actions. When you realize that everyone sins, you wmay even remember that you have cursed other people many times or thought ill of them.

**Ecc 7:23-26**

*I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. (24) What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it? (25) I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness. (26) And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.*

He continues to discuss humanities fall into sin. He states that he has tested all that he has been saying with wisdom. He even said that he will be wise but then determined that such a state was beyond his own ability. Perfection in wisdom is then impossible to attain in this life. All that has been done by God in creation and providence is out of the understanding of man. The image of God in man is marred and so perfect wisdom is unattainable. Job also understood this:

Job 28:12-13 *"But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? (13) "Man does not know its value, Nor is it found in the land of the living.*

He turned his mind to know wisdom and an explanation of its use and he tried to understand the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness since he saw both in the world. He knew that to be ensnared by an adulterous woman is even worse than death as it can lead to mental, physical, and spiritual degradation.

Pro 5:3-6 *For the lips of an adulteress drip honey And smoother than oil is her speech; (4) But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. (5) Her feet go down to death, Her steps take hold of Sheol. (6) She does not ponder the path of life; Her ways are unstable, she does not know it.*

This warning also applies to error and heresy and idolatry that is spiritual adultery. But those who fear the Lord will escape as Joseph did or if they fall into the trap as did Solomon they will be delivered out of them. If a person escapes such a trap he can be sure that God was involved in the release and he should give God all the glory. A person who is habitually an impenitent sinner and who rushes into sin will be caught by the snares and held by it. Pro 22:14 *The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; He who is cursed of the LORD will fall into it.*

**Ecc 7:27-29**

*"Behold, I have discovered this," says the Preacher, "adding one thing to another to find an explanation, (28) which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these. (29) "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."*

Solomon states that he has discovered these truths about the danger of a harlot. He states that he knows this as the Preacher to signify his repentance for his sin. His experience included the interaction with the thousand women that were either his wives or concubines. He sought with all his ability to find a chaste and virtuous woman but could not find one. He did find a small percentage of men who were righteous. Some think he is referring to Adam’s fall so that there is only one man who meets the requirements of God but none of the daughters of Eve. This last verse seems to support this conclusion since he said that initially God made men (meaning Adam and Eve) righteous but they tried to become as God and so fell into sin that affected all of mankind. God then sent His only Son into the world to earn salvation for those He ordained to be His people.