

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes: Ecclesiastes 7

"Wisdom For Life"

5/8/13

SUMMARY

In the first six chapters Solomon has shared with us his search for meaning (1:1-2:24) and observations gleaned during the course of his search (3:1-6:12). He has repeated his conclusions time and again.. * Life "under the sun" is vanity - 1:2,14; 2:11 * Yet there is good that one can do, provided one is blessed by God - 2:24-26; 5:18-20

In the remaining six chapters Solomon shares his counsel through a mixture of proverbs and narration. He imparts wisdom designed to make the most of life "under the sun". In other words, while life under the sun is "vanity", how then should we live?

The first half of chapter seven offers "counsel for better living" with a series of comparisons. For example, honor is better than luxury, your day of death is better than your day of birth, a funeral is better than a party, etc. His estimation of what is better may often sound strange, but it comes from who has learned from both experience as well as inspiration (1-14).

The second half of the chapter offers "counsel for balanced living." There are challenging and difficult statements which should be understood in their context, and in the context of the Bible as a whole. It appears the Preacher is mainly warning against extremism, and against the presumption that one can find the answer to every question in life (15-29).

I. COUNSEL FOR BETTER LIVING (7:1-14)

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. ² It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. ³ Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. ⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. ⁵ It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools. ⁶ Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless. ⁷ Extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. ⁸ The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. ⁹ Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. ¹⁰ Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions. ¹¹ Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. ¹² Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it. ¹³ Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? ¹⁴ When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.

A. HONOR IS BETTER THAN LUXURY (1a)

1. A good name is highly valued
2. Better than precious ointment (representative of luxury)

B. YOUR DEATH DAY IS BETTER THAN YOUR BIRTHDAY (1b)

1. One's birth is the beginning of sorrows - cf. [Job 14:1](#); [3:1-3](#); [Jer 20:14-18](#)
2. One's death can be the beginning of eternal bliss - cf. [Isa 57:1-2](#); [Re 14:13](#)

C. A FUNERAL IS BETTER THAN A PARTY (2-4)

1. Better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting
 - a. For the funeral home is the end of all men
 - b. Where the living will take it to heart
2. Sorrow is better than laughter, for a sad countenance makes a heart better
 - a. Thus the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning
 - b. While the heart of fools is in the house of mirth

ECCLESIASTES 7:1-4

This seems to contradict Solomon's previous advice to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in one's work—to enjoy what God has given. We are to enjoy what we have while we can but realize that adversity also strikes. Adversity reminds us that life is short, teaches us to live wisely, and refines our character. Christianity and Judaism see value in suffering and sorrow. The Greeks and Romans despised it; Eastern religions seek to live above it; but Christians and Jews see it as a refining fire. Most would agree that we learn more about God from difficult times than from happy times. Do you try to avoid sorrow and suffering at all cost? See your struggles as great opportunities to learn from God.

ECCLESIASTES 7:2, 4

Many people avoid thinking about death, refuse to face it, and are reluctant to attend funerals. Solomon is not encouraging us to think morbidly, but he knows that it is helpful to think clearly about death. It reminds us that there is still time for change, time to examine the direction of our life, and time to confess our sins and find forgiveness from God. Because everyone will eventually die, it makes sense to plan ahead to experience God's mercy rather than his justice.

D. A REBUKE OF THE WISE IS BETTER THAN THE SONG OF FOOLS (5-7)

1. For the laughter of the fool is vanity, like the crackling of thorn under a pot
2. Oppression destroys a wise man's reason, and a bribe debases his heart

E. THE END IS BETTER THAN THE BEGINNING (8a)

1. Similar to what we have already seen regarding birth and death - cf. [Ec 7:1](#)
2. Not all that starts has an end; in the completion of a task one finds satisfaction

ECCLESIASTES 7:7

Money talks, and it can confuse those who would otherwise judge fairly. We hear about bribes given to judges, police officers, and witnesses. Bribes are given to hurt those who tell the truth and help those who oppose it. The person who is involved in extortion or takes a bribe is indeed a fool, no matter how wise he thought he was beforehand. It is said that everyone has a price, but those who are truly wise cannot be bought at any price.

ECCLESIASTES 7:8

To finish what we start takes hard work, wisdom, self-discipline, and patience. Anyone with vision can start a big project. But vision without wisdom often results in unfinished projects and goals.

F. PATIENCE IS BETTER THAN PRIDE (8b-9)

1. The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit
2. Do not be hasty to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools

G. THE PRESENT IS BETTER THAN THE PAST (10)

1. We should not say "why were the former days better?"
2. One is not wise in thinking in such a manner

H. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN WEALTH (11-12)

1. Wisdom along with an inheritance is good, and profitable for the living
2. Wisdom is a defense like money, but wisdom gives life to those who have it

I. RESIGNATION IS BETTER THAN INDIGNATION (13-14)

1. There are some things of God we cannot change
2. God has appointed both the day of prosperity and the day of adversity, so man is unable to determine what will happen after him
3. The solution?
 - a. In the day of prosperity be joyful
 - b. In the day of adversity consider (e.g., what lessons might be learned)

ECCLESIASTES 7:14

God allows both good times and bad times to come to everyone. He blends them in our lives in such a way that we can't predict the future or count on human wisdom and power. We usually give ourselves the credit for the good times. Then in bad times, we tend to blame God without thanking him for the good that comes out of it. When life appears certain and controllable, don't let self-satisfaction or complacency make you too comfortable, or God may allow bad times to drive you back to him. When life seems uncertain and uncontrollable, don't despair—God is in control and will bring good results out of tough times.

II. COUNSEL FOR BALANCED LIVING (7:15-29)

¹⁵ In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness. ¹⁶ Do not be over righteous, neither be over wise—why destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Do not be over wicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes. ¹⁹ Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city. ²⁰ Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins. ²¹ Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you—²² for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

A. DO THINGS IN MODERATION (15-22)

1. The righteous don't always prosper, nor do the wicked always suffer

- a. Avoid extremism in seeking to righteous and wise, lest you destroy yourself
 - b. Avoid extremism in wickedness and foolishness, lest you die before your time
2. Don't refrain from true righteousness and wisdom
- a. Fearing God will help one escape extremism
 - b. Wisdom is a source of strength
 - c. But no one is perfect
3. Don't take to heart everything you hear
- a. You may hear another curse you
 - b. Yet you have likely cursed someone at sometime

ECCLESIASTES 7:16-18

How can a person be too good or too wise? This is a warning against pride—legalism or false righteousness. Solomon was saying that some people become so good or wise *in their own eyes* that they become deluded by their own religious acts. They are so rigid or narrow in their views that they lose their sensitivity to the true reason for being good—to honor God. Balance is important. God created us to be whole people who seek his righteousness and goodness. Thus, we should avoid both extremes of legalism and immorality.

B. WISDOM ALONE IS NOT THE ANSWER (23-29)

²³ All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise"—but this was beyond me.²⁴ Whatever exists is far off and most profound—who can discover it? ²⁵ So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. ²⁶ I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. ²⁷ "Look," says the Teacher, "this is what I have discovered: "Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things—²⁸ while I was still searching but not finding—I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. ²⁹ This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes."

ECCLESIASTES 7:23-25

Solomon, the wisest man in the world, confessed how difficult it had been to act and think wisely. He emphasized that no matter how much we know, there are always mysteries we will never understand. So thinking you have wisdom is a sure sign that you don't.

ECCLESIASTES 7:27, 28

Did Solomon think women were not capable of being upright (wise and good)? No, because in the book of Proverbs he personified wisdom as a responsible woman. The point of Solomon's statement is not that women are unwise, but that hardly anyone, man or woman, is upright before God. In his search, Solomon found that goodness and wisdom were almost as scarce among men as among women, even though men were given a religious education program in his culture and women were not. In effect, the verse is saying, "I have found only one in a thousand people who is wise in God's eyes. No, I have found even fewer than that!"