

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 7

God Is In Control

God's perspective is different from ours; even when life seems chaotic and out of control, God is still sovereign.

God doesn't cause all things, but he is in control of all things.

He has an infinite knowledge of the past, present and future, which gives him a much better perspective on the world than we have.

When we look at the "word" of history rather than the letters, we know he is sovereign.

Remember, proverbs are not "absolute statements", but rather "general truths."

Remember also the seasons in Ch.3.

Teacher outlines several things as "good" or "better". In light of 6:12 [Slide 2]:

¹² For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

**This is a challenging chapter

[Slide 3] Read Ecc 7: 1-2

¹ A good name is better than precious ointment,

and the day of death than the day of birth.

² It is better to go to the house of mourning

than to go to the house of feasting,

for this is the end of all mankind,

and the living will lay it to heart.

We've seen this a few times: The teacher seems to throw up his hands in despair at the elements that are uncertain or incomprehensible, yet will urge wise and responsible behavior.

(Because God is sovereign and judges human behavior.)

These proverbs focus to a degree on death, it looks like he is obsessed with it. But look how he opens the chapter: The value of a good name.

A good name signifies a good character.

How do we earn a good name? Not by never living or by dying immediately. But through the good works we do – it is at the end of one's life when one's reputation is established and can be evaluated as a whole. So, for a man with a good name his name is better after living.

Precious ointment represents what is costly and fragrant. The thought is that the most expensive perfume can never take the place of an honorable life.

V2: When we come face to face with death, we are brought up short. We recognize that one day it will be our time. The living will lay it to heart.

He is saying not to fear it or to fight it, but to face it.

The house of feasting is an earthly pleasure, which the teacher already showed to be 'hebel' in chapter 2.

[Slide 4] Read Ecc 7: 3-4

³ Sorrow is better than laughter,

for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,

but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

In the presence of death, a wise person maintains calmness even though have sorrow for the one who has died.

Wise <-> Fools : The teacher has already told us about the "gift of God" (5:19). It follows that the wise would have that and the fools would not.

Recall that “heart” refers to emotion and thought.

The mind is sharpened when we have to grapple with the great issues of life.

Oftentimes, some of the wisest people are those who have experienced deep suffering.

In my life, it seems my character has grown the most at the times when circumstances have been most difficult.

Often, wisdom is developed through the crucible of hard times.

[Slide 5] Read Ecc 7: 5-6

⁵ It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.

⁶ For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of the fools;
this also is vanity.

‘better’ - Constructive criticism instructs, corrects, and warns. The empty mirth of fools accomplishes nothing of lasting value.

The song of fools in 7.6 is an interesting metaphor: crackling of thorns under a pot. Dry thorns were used to start a fire because they provided quick combustion. They don’t give off much heat, but they cause a lot of noise.

Fools are the same way – they make a lot of noise but don’t provide much substance.

[Slide 6] Read Ecc 7: 7

Surely oppression drives the wise into madness,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Both adversity and prosperity tempt people to abandon a wise lifestyle for one of folly.

The wise man’s prosperity might tempt him to accept a bribe, or his adversity might tempt him to oppress others.

[Slide 7] Read Ecc 7: 8

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,

and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

It is at the end when you can evaluate it as a whole.

Some of the best advice we get in life will be advice we don't want to hear. Maybe it's a rebuke, or someone trying to redirect your energies.

[Slide 8] Read Ecc 7:9-10

⁹ Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,

for anger lodges in the heart[b] of fools.

¹⁰ Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"

For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

7:9 - Ever meet anyone with a short fuse? They blow up at the least provocation – and look foolish.

7:10 – “The good old days” as if things were so much better in the past. Remember that nothing is new under the sun.

[Slide 9] Read Ecc 7:11

Wisdom is good with an inheritance,

an advantage to those who see the sun.

Solomon's thought with regard to wisdom and an inheritance may be understood in several ways.

First, wisdom is good with an inheritance (NKJV; NASB); it enables the recipient to administer his bequest carefully.

Second, wisdom is good as an inheritance (JND); if one could choose only one heritage, wisdom would be a good choice.

Third, wisdom is as good as an inheritance; it is a source of wealth.

[Slide 10] Read Ecc 7:12

For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,

and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

A similar thought is found in **[Slide 11]** Pr. 3:16:

¹³ Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, ¹⁴ for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. ¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. ¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

[Slide 12] Read Ecc 7:13-14

¹³ Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

The teacher presents us with another “Who” question.

Recall studying of 1:15, What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

God is ultimately in control. There will be different seasons, as we saw in Ch. 3.

[Slide 13] Read Ecc 7:15-18

¹⁵ In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

¹⁶ Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

NB: Even scholars disagree about what the Teacher is saying here!

One interpretation: We shouldn't be too good or too bad. (Does not fit with rest of scripture, and that would point to being lukewarm.)

Another interpretation: Some interpret righteous as “self-righteous” – we shouldn’t think too highly of ourselves.

A Third: The teacher is saying not to trust in our own goodness to get us through life without trouble – righteous living doesn’t guarantee worldly blessing.

Recall how “righteous” the Pharisees were.

Regardless, 7:18 makes it clear that fearing God is the proper response here.

One who fears God should avoid either extreme.

[Slide 14] Read Ecc 7:19-22

¹⁹ Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

²⁰ Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

²¹ Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. ²² Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Here are some additional proverbs. Earlier, the Teacher said wisdom was “hebel”; we see here that the Teacher doesn’t mean it is useless.

7:21 – People will criticize us; consider what they are saying, don’t always take it to heart. Realize too that sometimes we are critical of others.

7:19-22 Wisdom may be greater than the collective opinions of experienced leaders, and needed in the light of human sinfulness, which is seen especially in talk. One should not pay much attention to the vindictiveness of others. Our own thoughts and speech ought to make us realize its frequent inaccuracy.

[Slide 15] Read Ecc 7:23-24

²³ All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me.

²⁴ That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

7:23-4 Wisdom is hard to find, elusive. “Who can find it out?”

[Slide 16][Slide 17] Read Ecc 7:25-29

²⁵ I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness. ²⁶ And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. ²⁷ Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— ²⁸ which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. ²⁹ See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

7:26, heart is snares and nets – a seductive hunter. Hands that entrap. A wise one she cannot capture, only a sinner (foolish).

[Slide 18] Similar thoughts are found in Proverbs 2, with v 19: none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.

7:27 adding one thing to another (summing up). Scheme of things = explanation, reason, the account – depending on translation.

Man here = “adam” [mankind] (contrast with 7:5, “ish” [male]) woman = ‘ishshah’

[Slide 19]

God has created order and balance in life, but rather than heeding God’s design, humans have focused their attention in misguided ways.

Gen 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was **very** good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,