

# ***Ecclesiastes***

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem”

## I. Review (Eccl. 6:10-12)

- A. God has ordained this state of affairs.
  - 1. According to the ordinance of God, the creation cannot yield ultimate enjoyment without the fear of God.
  - 2. No one has the power to challenge God’s determination of our lives.
  - 3. God has determined to frustrate rebellious man by means of the material creation. (Gen. 3)
- B. The true path of wisdom is for a man to acknowledge his limitations:
  - 1. His rebellious bent against God.
  - 2. Begin to fear the Lord. (Prov. 1:7)
    - a) Prosperity without the gift of God is not always what it seems to be.
    - b) Contentment with the gifts that God gives us.
    - c) The wise man understands that he cannot be the source of his own enjoyment; he must discover in his humility his utter dependence upon God for **life** and **satisfaction**.

*[Doug Wilson has summarized the situation thus: God has given everyone a can of peaches (common grace). He only gives believers the can opener.]*

## II. “Good, Better, Best; Bad, Worse, Worst.” (Eccl. 7:1-12)

- A. A short primer on Wisdom Literature.
  - 1. God’s ways are often quite paradoxical because His explicit intentions are unavailable to us. (Eccl. 3:11)
  - 2. The ‘character’ of wisdom.

*Pro 1:5-6 ESV*

*(5) Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance,  
(6) to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.*

- a) Proverb (Hebrew **Maschal**): Short, pithy, riddle-like statement, as well as longer more complex statements like parables.
  - 1) The meaning lies below the surface.
  - 2) The Fool looks only at the superficial meaning and does not understand. (Christ spoke in parables for this purpose. Matt. 13:13)
- b) Riddle (Hebrew **Chiydah**): An enigma. A puzzle that takes time and effort to solve or understand.
- 3. The one who diligently ponders and searches for the meaning will attain wisdom. (Prov. 2:1-9; Eccl. 12:9)
  - a) Typical western thinking looks for practical, pragmatic how-to programs.
  - b) Look for the ‘quick fix.’
- 4. Biblical wisdom is a function of character and experience.
  - a) Wisdom involves know-how, skill, observation, contemplation,

experience, and discernment. (II Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:14)  
b) Qualities that are developed over time.

## B. Comparative Judgements: Good vs. Better vs. Best (Eccl. 7:1-12)

### 1. Death is a better instructor of the living than birth (7:1-4)

a. (7:1) Good: Precious ointment; Better: A good name (Mark 14:3-9) so day of birth: Good; Day of death: Better.

1) House of mourning: Wake or funeral-death. The end of all men.

2) House of feasting: Implies drinking and carousing.

3) The living would do well to ponder their inescapable fate, especially in light of the coming final judgement.

b. The wise must ponder the significance of death. (Ps. 90:12, "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to thee a heart of wisdom.")

### 2. Rebuke is better than frivolous praise. (7:5-7)

a. [Psa 141:5 ESV](#) Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds.

b. [Pro 27:6 ESV](#) Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

c. [Heb 12:11 ESV](#) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

d. Thorns burn quickly, make lots of noise, but produce no useful heat.

e. Caveat: Affliction can drive even the wise to accept the song of a fool.

f. Augustine: "Far rather would I be censured by anyone whatsoever, than to be praised by either the erring or the flatterer. For the lover of truth need fear no one's censure. For he that censures must needs be either enemy or friend. And if an enemy reviles, he must be borne with: but a friend, if he errs, must be taught; if he teaches, listened to" (*On the Trinity*, 1.3.5).

### 3. Patient hope is better than arrogant whining (7:8-10)

a. To deny that problems are inherent in life under the sun or are from the hand of God.

b. Roman poet Horace called *lauditor temporis acti* : A praiser of the past.

1) A nostalgic escape into the past is foolish.

2) True wisdom does not champion the past over the present.

### 4. The conclusion of the matter (7:11-12).

a. Wisdom is defined as that which gives or preserves life.

b. Solomon connects *yithrown* (advantage, leverage, profit) of 1:3 to wisdom!

1) There is no advantage to labor alone.

2) Advantage in life is available to the wise alone.

III. A Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery Inside an Enigma (Eccl. 7:13-8:17)

<“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:9).”

- A. True wisdom recognizes God’s unmanageable disposition over your earthly life.
1. True wisdom consists of fearing God (7:18).
  2. The person who thinks he can gain leverage (through godliness) reveals a heart of unbelief.
    - a. **1Ti 6:4-5 ESV:** He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, **imagining that godliness is a means of gain.**
    - b. **Jas 4:13-16 ESV:** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"-- **yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.** What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." **As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.**
- B. We are to meditate on God’s control over our lives.
1. (7:13) Consider: Hebrew ‘see.’ Means evaluate, discern, and come to a proper conclusion.
    - a. Eccl. 1:15 “What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.”
    - b. Eccl. 7:13 - God is the bender.
    - c. The righteous man carefully considers what he sees.
      - 1) Rejoice in prosperity when it comes.
      - 2) Consider in adversity for God made them both.
  2. (7:15) Incongruous fates observed by Solomon.
    - a. Righteous man who perishes in his righteousness vs. the wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.
      - 1) Solomon has frequently seen this.
      - 2) Behavior does not guarantee reward. Specifically, righteous behavior does not necessarily guarantee reward from God.
  3. (7:16-17) Two imperatives (commands)
    - 1) Excessively righteous/overly wise.
      - a) Self-made righteousness - pietism in the extreme.
      - b) Presumptuously self-sufficient.
    - 2) Excessively wicked
      - a) Vv. 16-17 are not symmetrical.
      - b) God does indeed punish the wicked in this life.
  4. (7:18) Careful to avoid false righteousness and shun evil behavior.
    - 1) Not to prolong life or gain reward.
    - 2) Motivated by the fear of God.

**Two weeks from today: The Mystery of Fallen Human Nature!**