

ECCLESIASTES 7: 1 A good name is better than fine perfume; and the day of death better than the day of one's birth.

The value of a good name, Ecc 7:1. Advantages of sorrow and correction, Ecc 7:2-5. The emptiness of a fool's joy, Ecc 7:6. Of oppression, Ecc 7:7. The end better than the beginning, Ecc 7:8. Against hastiness of spirit, Ecc 7:9. Comparison of former and present times, Ecc 7:10. Excellence of wisdom, Ecc 7:11, Ecc 7:12. Of the dispensations of Providence, Ecc 7:13-15. Against extremes, Ecc 7:16-18. The strength of wisdom, Ecc 7:19. Man is ever liable to sin and mistake, Ecc 7:20. We should guard our words, Ecc 7:21, Ecc 7:22. Difficulty of obtaining wisdom, Ecc 7:23-25, A bad woman dangerous, Ecc 7:26. There are few who are really upright, Ecc 7:27-29.

Verse 1

A good name - Unsatisfactory as all sublunary things are, yet still there are some which are of great consequence, and among them a good name. The place is well paraphrased in the following verses: "A spotless name,

By virtuous deeds acquired, is sweeter far
Than fragrant balms, whose odors round diffused
Regale the invited guests. Well may such men
Rejoice at death's approach, and bless the hours
That end their toilsome pilgrimage; assured
That till the race of life is finish'd none
Can be completely blest."

ECCLESIASTES 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 should take this to heart.

Verse 2

It is better to go to the house of mourning - Birthdays were generally kept with great festivity, and to these the wise man most probably refers; but according to his maxim, the miseries of life were so many and so oppressive that the day of a man's death was to be preferred to the day of his birth. But, independently of the allusion, it is much more profitable to visit the house of mourning for the dead than the house of festivity. In the former we find occasion for serious and deeply edifying thoughts and reflections; from the latter we seldom return with one profitable thought or one solid impression.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 3 Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the face the heart is made good.

Verse 3

Sorrow is better than laughter - The reason is immediately given; for by the sorrow of the countenance - the grief of heart that shows itself in the countenance: -

The heart is made better - In such cases, most men try themselves at the tribunal of their own consciences, and resolve on amendment of life.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Verse 4

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning - A wise man loves those occasions from which he can derive spiritual advantage; and therefore prefers visiting the sick, and sympathizing with those who have suffered privations by death. But the fool - the gay, thoughtless, and giddy - prefers places and times of diversion and amusement. Here he is prevented from seriously considering either himself or his latter end. The grand fault and misfortune of youth.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.

Verse 6

For as the crackling of thorns - They make a great noise, a great blaze; and are extinguished in a few moments. Such indeed, comparatively, are the joys of life; they are noisy, flashy, and transitory.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 7 Surely extortion makes the wise man foolish; and a bribe destroys the understanding.

Verse 7

Oppression maketh a wise man mad - This has been translated with good show of reason, "Surely oppression shall give lustre to a wise man: but a gift corrupteth the heart."

The chief difference here is in the word יהולל yeholel, which, from the root הלל halal, signifies to glisten, irradiate, as well as to move briskly, to be mad, furious, in a rage; and certainly the former meaning suits this place best. We cannot think that the wise man - he that is truly religious, (for this is its meaning in the language of Solomon), can be made mad by any kind of oppression; but as he trusts in God, so in patience he possesses his soul.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning. The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Verse 8

Better is the end - We can then judge of the whole, and especially if the matter relate to the conduct of Divine Providence. At the beginning we are often apt to make very rash conjectures, and often suppose that such and such things are against us; and that every thing is going wrong. Dr. Byrom gives good advice on such a subject: - "With patient mind thy course of duty run:

God nothing does, nor suffers to be done,
But thou wouldst do thyself, couldst thou but see
The end of all events, as well as He."

I may add, in the words of our paraphrast: - "Wait the result, nor ask with frantic rage

Why God permits such things. His ways, though now

Involved in clouds and darkness, will appear

All right, when from thine eyes the mist is cleared.

Till then, to learn submission to his will

More wisdom shows, than vainly thus to attempt

Exploring what thou canst not comprehend,

And God for wisest ends thinks fit to hide."

C.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 9 Don't be hasty in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.

Verse 9

Anger resteth in the bosom of fools - A wise man, off his guard, may feel it for a moment: but in him it cannot rest: it is a fire which he immediately casts out of his breast. But the fool - the man who is under the dominion of his own tempers, harbors and fosters it, till it takes the form of malice, and then excites him to seek full revenge on those whom he deems enemies. Hence that class of dangerous and empty fools called duellists.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 10 Don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not ask wisely about this.

Verse 10

The former days were better than these? - This is a common saying; and it is as foolish as it is common. There is no weight nor truth in it; but men use it to excuse their crimes, and the folly of their conduct. "In former times, say they, men might be more religious, use more self-denial, be more exemplary." This is all false. In former days men were wicked as they are now, and religion was unfashionable: God also is the same now as he was then; as just, as merciful, as ready to help: and there is no depravity in the age that will excuse your crimes, your follies, and your carelessness.

Among the oriental proverbs I find the following: "Many say, This is a corrupt age. This mode of speaking is not just, it is not the age that is corrupt, but the men of the age."

ECCLESIASTES 7: 11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance. Yes, it is more excellent for those who see the sun.

Verse 11

Wisdom is good with an inheritance - In this chapter Solomon introduces many observations which appear to be made by objectors against his doctrine; and as he was satisfied of their futility, he proposes them in their own full strength, and then combats and destroys them. It is quite necessary to attend to this; else we shall take the objector's words for those of Solomon; and think, as some have done, that the wise man contradicts and refutes himself. Observations, reflections, and objections of friends and adversaries are frequently introduced in the works of ancient authors, without mentioning them as such. This is frequent, more particularly in ethic writers; and we have many specimens in Horace, and without this distinction, it would be impossible to make sense of some of his writings. Here, an objector who had listened to the wise man declaiming in favor of wisdom, suddenly interrupts him, and says in effect, "I grant the truth of what you have said. Wisdom is very good in its place; but what is it without property? A man who has a good inheritance may be profited by wisdom, because it will show him how to manage it to the best advantage."

ECCLESIASTES 7: 12 For wisdom is a defence, even as money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

Verse 12

Wisdom is a defense - To whom Solomon answers: All true wisdom is most undoubtedly a great advantage to men in all circumstances; and money is also of great use: but it cannot be compared to wisdom. Knowledge of Divine and human things is a great blessing. Money is the means of supporting our animal life: but wisdom - the religion of the true God - gives life to them that have it. Money cannot procure the favor of God, nor give life to the soul.

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

Verse 13

Consider the work of God - Such is the nature of his providence, that it puts money into the hands of few: but wisdom is within the reach of all. The first is not necessary to happiness; therefore, it is not offered to men; the latter is; and therefore God, in his goodness, offers it to the whole human race. The former can rarely be acquired, for God puts it out of the reach of most men, and you cannot make that straight which he has made crooked; the latter may be easily attained by every person who carefully and seriously seeks it from God.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; yes, God has made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything after him.

Verse 14

In the day of prosperity be joyful - When ye receive these temporal gifts from God, enjoy them, and be thankful to the Giver: but remember, this sunshine will not always last. God has balanced prosperity and adversity against each other; and were it not so, how many would put the former in the place of God himself!

ECCLESIASTES 7: 15 All this have I seen in my days of vanity: there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his evildoing.

Verse 15

There is a just man that perisheth - This is another objection as if he had said, "I also have had considerable experience; and I have not discovered any marked approbation of the conduct of the righteous, or disapprobation of that of the wicked. On the contrary, I have seen a righteous man perish, while employed in the work of righteousness; and a wicked man prosperous, and even exalted, while living wickedly. The former is indeed a victim to his righteousness, while the life and prosperity of the latter were preserved: hence I conclude, it is not prudent, whatever good there may be in religion, and whatever excellence in wisdom, that men should be overmuch righteous, or over-wise: for why should they by austerity and hard study destroy themselves?" So far the objector.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 16 Don't be overly righteous, neither make yourself overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself?

Verse 16

Why shouldest thou destroy thyself? - תִּשְׁחַמֵּם תִּשְׁחַמֵּם tishshomem, make thyself desolate, so that thou shalt be obliged to stand alone; neither make thyself over-wise, תִּתְחַכֵּם tithchaccam, do not pretend to

abundance of wisdom. Why shouldst thou be so singular? In other words, and in modern language, "There is no need of all this watching, fasting, praying, self-denial, etc., you carry things to extremes. Why should you wish to be reputed singular and precise?" To this the man of God answers:

ECCLESIASTES 7: 17 Don't be too wicked, neither be foolish. Why should you die before your time?

Verse 17

Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time? - אל תרשע הרבה al tirsha harbeh. Do not multiply wickedness, do not add direct opposition to godliness to the rest of your crimes. Why should you provoke God to destroy you before your time? Perdition will come soon enough. If you will not turn from your sins, and avoid it finally, yet keep out of it as long as you can.

It cannot be supposed, except by those who are totally unacquainted with the nature of true religion, that a man may have too much holiness, too much of the life of God in his soul! And yet a learned doctor, in three sermons on this text, has endeavored to show, out-doing Solomon's infidel, "the sin, folly, and danger of being righteous overmuch." O rare darkness!

ECCLESIASTES 7: 18 It is good that you should take hold of this. Yes, also from that don't withdraw your hand; for he who fears God will come out of them all.

Verse 18

It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this - Do not let such an observation slip: take hold of this; do not forget that. Get what you can in an honest way; but do not forget to get true religion; for he that fears God will be saved from all evil.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 19 Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

Verse 19

Wisdom strengtheneth the wise - One wise, thoroughly learned, and scientific man, may be of more use in fortifying and defending a city, than ten princes. Witness the case of Syracuse, when attacked by the Romans both by sea and land. Archimedes, by his engines, burnt and dashed their fleet to pieces, and destroyed all that came near the walls. And had not the city been betrayed and he killed, all their force and skill could not have taken it.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth, who does good and doesn't sin.

Verse 20

There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not - אִישׁ יָשָׁר לֹא יֵחַתָּה, that may not sin. There is not a man upon earth, however just he may be, and habituated to do good, but is peccable - liable to commit sin; and therefore should continually watch and pray, and depend upon the Lord. But the text does not say, the just man does commit sin, but simply that he may sin; and so our translators have rendered it in 1Sam 2:25, twice in 1Kgs 8:31, 1Kgs 8:46, and 2Chr 6:36; and the reader is requested to consult the note on 1Kgs 8:46, where the proper construction of this word may be found, and the doctrine in question is fully considered.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 21 Also don't take heed to all words that are spoken, lest you hear your servant curse you;

Verse 21

Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken - This is good advice, and much for every man's peace through life.

Thy servant curse thee - מְקַלְלֶךָ mekallelecha, make light of thee, speak evil of thee.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 22 for often your own heart knows that you yourself have likewise cursed others.

Verse 22

Thou thyself - hast cursed others - קָלַלְתָּ kalalta, thou hast spoken evil; hast vilified others. O, who is free from evil speaking, from uncharitable speaking; from detailing their neighbor's faults, from whispering, talebearing, and backbiting? Do not wonder if God, in his justice, permit thee to be calumniated, seeing thou hast so frequently calumniated others. See my discourse on Psa 15:1-5 (note).

ECCLESIASTES 7: 23 All this have I proved in wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me.

Verse 23

All this have I proved by wisdom - These rules I have laid down for my own conduct, and sought after more wisdom; but have fallen far short of what I wished to be.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 24 That which is, is far off and exceedingly deep. Who can find it out?

Verse 24

That which is far off - Though the wisdom that is essential to our salvation may be soon learned, through the teaching of the Spirit of wisdom, yet in wisdom itself there are extents and depths which none can reach or fathom.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 25 I turned around, and my heart sought to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity, and that foolishness is madness.

Verse 25

I applied mine heart - I cast about, סבּוּתִי sabbothi, I made a circuit; I circumscribed the ground I was to traverse; and all within my circle I was determined to know, and to investigate, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things. Has man reason and understanding? If so, then this is his work. God as much calls him to use these powers in this way, as to believe on the Lord Jesus that he may be saved; and he that does not, according to the means in his power, is a slothful servant, from whom God may justly take away the misemployed or not used talent, and punish him for his neglect. Every doctrine of God is a subject both for reason and faith to work on.

To know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness - "And my own heart, with scrutiny severe,

By far the harder task survey'd; intent

To trace that wisdom which from heaven descends,

Fountain of living waters, and to explore

The source of human folly, whose foul streams

Intoxicate and kill." - C.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 26 I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and traps, whose hands are chains. Whoever pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner will be ensnared by her.

Verse 26

And I find more bitter than death the woman - After all his investigation of the wickedness of folly, and the foolishness of madness, he found nothing equally dangerous and ruinous with the blandishments of cunning women. When once the affections are entangled, escape without ruin is almost impossible.

Whoso pleaseth God - The man who walks with God, and he alone, shall escape this sore evil: and even he that fears God, if he get with an artful woman, may be soon robbed of his strength, and become like other men. A bad or artful woman is represented as a company of hunters, with nets, gins, etc., to catch their prey.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 27 "Behold, I have found this," says the Preacher, "one to another, to find out the scheme;

Verse 27

Counting one by one - I have gone over every particular. I have compared one thing with another; man with woman, his wisdom with her wiles; his strength with her blandishments; his influence with her ascendancy; his powers of reason with her arts and cunning; and in a thousand men, I have found one thoroughly upright man; but among one thousand women I have not found one such. This is a lamentable account of the state of morals in Judea, in the days of the wise King Solomon. Thank God! it would not be difficult to get a tithe of both in the same number in the present day.

The Targum gives this a curious turn: "There is another thing which my soul has sought, but could not find: a man perfect and innocent, and without corruption, from the days of Adam until Abraham the just was born; who was found faithful and upright among the thousand kings who came together to construct the tower of Babel: but a woman like to Sarah among the wives of all those kings I have not found."

ECCLESIASTES 7: 28 which my soul still seeks; but I have not found. One man among a thousand have I found; but I have not found a woman among all those.

ECCLESIASTES 7: 29 Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright; but they search for many schemes."

Verse 29

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright - Whatever evil may be now found among men and women, it is not of God; for God made them all upright. This is a singular verse, and has been most variously translated: עשה האלהים את האדם ישר והמה בקשו חשבנות רבים asah haelohim eth haadam yashar vehemhah bikkeshu chishbonoth rabbim. "Elohim has made mankind upright, and they have sought many computations." "He hath meddled with endless questions." - Vulgate. "Many reasonings." - Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic. "They seek diverse sotylties." Coverdale.

And he himself mengide with questions without eend. - Old MS. Bible.

The Targum considers the text as speaking of Adam and Eve. "This have I found out, that the Lord made the first man upright before him, and innocent: but the serpent and Eve seduced him to eat of the fruit of the tree, which gave the power to those who ate of it to discern between good and evil; and was the cause that death came upon him, and all the inhabitants of the earth; and they sought that they might find out many stratagems to bring this evil upon all the inhabitants of the world."

I doubt much whether the word חשבנות chishbonoth should be taken in a bad sense. It may signify the whole of human devices, imaginations, inventions, artifice, with all their products; arts, sciences, schemes, plans, and all that they have found out for the destruction or melioration of life. God has given man wondrous faculties; and of them he has made strange uses, and sovereign abuses: and they have been, in consequence, at one time his help, and at another his bane. This is the fair way of understanding this question.