

ECCLESIASTES

Lesson 6 w/Answers

Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

This week Solomon again turns his attention to wisdom, and we can see through this study some of the practical side of applying the wisdom which Solomon examines: the value of a good name; and the difference between a truly wise person--and someone who believes that they are wise, but in fact, are not.

As we look at the challenges facing us in the world today, whether it is the environment, healthcare, education, or conflicts around the world, we need wise leaders. We need a source of strength, conviction, and determination that only a wise and righteous leader can bring. We need Christ and His wisdom in our lives and in the lives of those whom we depend on as leaders.

Let's read chapter seven and consider the following:

1. As Solomon begins his discussion of wisdom, what is the first thing he cites as "good" in Verse 1 of Chapter 7?
 - a. ANSWER: The value of having a "good name", because without it, you have no credibility. It's worth noting that a good name is not something that we can buy or acquire; rather, it is something earned over a long period of time, and it is dependent on many factors. Further, it is something that can be destroyed in one single moment by a bad or foolish decision.
2. What are the characteristics, values, and/or behaviors that we associate with having a "good name"?
 - a. ANSWER: Integrity, high moral values, wisdom, trustworthiness, intelligence, and dependability, just to name a few.
3. What effect does the quality of a family name have on our children or the children of others?
 - a. ANSWER: A child is influenced by the good or bad name associated with his or her family. It affects how they interact with their peers, their teachers, neighbors and so on. Someone who causes the family name to be bad or go bad affects not only themselves but their children and their children's children for many generations.
4. Based on our responses above, could we argue that perhaps one of the things missing from our global leadership is a good name, and, if so, why is that? Relatedly, why is the lack of having a "good name" also one of the impediments to being a good leader?
 - a. ANSWER: Our good name gives people confidence in us. It is associated with a person of integrity, having high moral values, honesty, sincerity, and wisdom. With a bad name, these values are missing, so, as a result, we will have no confidence in that person.
5. In verses two through four, Solomon refers to death in what many may find a strange way. Why does Solomon say the day of death is better than the day of birth? (see also 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 and Philippians 1:21-23)
 - a. ANSWER While we see death as a time of mourning when someone we love passes from this life, we also know that, following death, believers find themselves in heaven with Christ our savior. During our time on this earth we suffer and struggle with life and its many challenges; but after this life we have a heavenly destination and an eternity with Jesus who died so that we can be saved. Our heavenly home is more beautiful than we can describe and is an eternal home. No longer struggling with the ills and challenges of this human existence, we leave all of that behind and enter into an eternal peace and existence that mere words cannot describe. This is why Solomon believed the day of death was better, since our struggles and challenges are behind us; and our new life, new heavenly body, and eternal existence with Jesus and God awaits us.
6. Why does Solomon say that "sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart"?
 - a. ANSWER: We learn from sorrow. Solomon is teaching us that through our sadness and our mourning, we are growing wiser and stronger. Those who spend their days seeking only pleasure are fooling themselves and are ill-prepared for times of struggle and sadness when it comes upon them.
7. What does our sorrow indicate to others?
 - a. ANSWER: It indicates that we cared about the person who has died, or at least that we care about those who survive and sympathize with their loss and their pain.
8. What does Solomon mean when he writes "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure"? (see also Romans 12:9-16)
 - a. ANSWER: Mourning and the sadness over the loss of a loved one demonstrates love and caring in a public way. Fools are those who constantly seek pleasure, and avoid discomfort, pain, and struggle—or so they think.

9. Solomon continues with his analysis of the fool versus the wise man. What does he tell us in Verse 7 that rings true today, and is thus a warning to us of a trap we should not fall into? Have we seen this happen to people around us whom we held in high regard? Does it destroy or damage our confidence in people and institutions when we see it happen?
- ANSWER: Corruption found in a leader, neighbor, friend, or even relative, destroys our confidence in them; and, if they represent an institution or organization, it destroys our confidence in that entire organization, not just the offender. Nothing in my mind corrupts people's thinking and values quicker than greed; and bribes, kickbacks, gifts—whatever you call them—cause those receiving them to rot at their very core. All we need to do is look in the headlines and we can find many examples in our own leadership where this has happened exactly as Solomon describes. Nothing ruins a good name faster than corruption, and nothing ruins our confidence in leadership quicker than this.
10. James tells us we are to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). What does Solomon tell us in Verses 8 and 9?
- ANSWER: Solomon asserts that the wise do not overreact; however, the fool does. We should not act hastily and irrationally, driven by emotion or bravado. As followers of Christ, we should take the time necessary to pray and consider God's will in all that we do before we take an action or make a decision. However, having said that, this should not become an excuse for indecision. Often, the situation will dictate the need for a quick decision or action. If we are trusting Christ with our lives and our thoughts each day, He will provide that wisdom for us. It's only when we drive our entire decision-making by our own strength, our own "wisdom", and our own emotional motives that cause us to be foolish and make bad decisions.
11. In Verse 10, Solomon makes an interesting statement. Are you the person he is referring to, or have you ever done this? Do you know of people who do this? What is wrong with it?
- ANSWER: We all do this from time to time. It's always fun thinking about "the good old days", but be careful. If we spend all of our time looking back, we can't be focused in living and working in the Kingdom today. If our attention is focused on the past, how can we be ready to address the evils of the day and the needs of those around us? Before you know it, your whole life will have passed by and you will have accomplished nothing for Christ.
12. In verses 11-14, Solomon tells us more about the virtues of wisdom and about the futility of worrying over things that we have no control over. Do you think that many of us spend too much time trying to do exactly what Solomon tells us not to do in verse 14? Were Christ's disciples doing this as well?
- ANSWER: Yes. All of us want to know what the future holds for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. Even the disciples wondered when Christ would set up his earthly kingdom and when each of the things that Christ prophesied would take place. Earlier, we looked at folks who spend inordinate amounts of time living in the past and always looking back. Here, we see the opposite extreme—people consumed with the future. Solomon warns us that this, too, is folly. Don't be caught in either snare; you can't change the past, and you have little control over the future. Live each day for Christ, seeking His Kingdom, and He will take care of the rest.
13. In verses 15-18, Solomon looks at extremes: wisdom versus folly, righteousness versus the unrighteousness. How could we paraphrase verse 15 in order to make it applicable today? Perhaps you have even heard sermons on this subject. How does Matthew 5:44-45 apply here?
- ANSWER: Good things happen to bad people, and bad things happen to good people. We are, in the final analysis, a fallen people affected by sin, living in a fallen world on a planet cursed by sin. Unexplained and undeserved good and bad things will happen to all of us, (see Matthew 5:44-45)
14. During the time of Christ's earthly ministry, who would have qualified as a group of people trying to do what Solomon says not to do in verse 16?
- ANSWER: The Pharisees.
15. Solomon really provides us with a key precept for living in verse 18. Compare what Solomon writes here with what he wrote in Proverbs 2:1-6. What is he teaching us?
- ANSWER: He is teaching us to fear God, to put our trust in Him, and to let Him lead us and comfort us. He is indicating that we should not put our trust in mankind or in our own strength.
16. Compare Romans 3:23 with Ecclesiastes 7:19. What do they tell us?
- ANSWER: That all have sinned, i.e., that there is not a righteous man or woman on the earth today, and there will never be one until Christ returns.
17. Wrapping up his study of the wise man versus the foolish man, Solomon arrives at a final conclusion in verse 29. What is it?
- ANSWER: That God's plan was for man to be upright and righteous in God's eyes, but man had different ideas and followed after other "schemes". Man sinned and fell short of God's righteousness. The evil and sin in the world today were not caused by God, but by man.

Let's commit this week to focus on living a life that is driven by a quest for God's wisdom. Let's commit that more and more, we will come to depend on Christ for all that we are and do. And let's begin to hold ourselves, our families, and our leaders accountable for their actions as well, striving always to live a life pleasing to God—a life that is a living testimony that Christ is alive in us. Wes