

### God Gives Advice for Living

#### Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 - <sup>15</sup> *I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.*

<sup>16</sup> *Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself?*

<sup>17</sup> *Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time?*

<sup>18</sup> *It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.*

<sup>19</sup> *Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.*

<sup>20</sup> *For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.*

<sup>21</sup> *Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.*

<sup>22</sup> *For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.*

<sup>23</sup> *All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me.*

<sup>24</sup> *As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?*

<sup>25</sup> *I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.*

<sup>26</sup> *And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her.*

<sup>27</sup> *Here is what I have found," says the Preacher, "Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: one man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found.*

<sup>29</sup> *Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes."*

#### Background Notes

In the first half of Ecclesiastes 7 we learned that God does not give a blueprint for our lives, but He does give us something that's far better - counsel for living. Let's face it: life is not easy. There are ups and downs. There are trials and temptations. There are good days and bad days. There are extended periods of adversity and extended periods of prosperity - and we don't know when or where these changes will take place. Proverbs 27:1 says, "*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*"

How do we face life in the midst of all the unknowns? If you try to figure life out from the "under the sun" viewpoint, apart from God's revelation, you will come to the conclusion that life does not make sense. It seems that life's events are just happenstance or coincidence, and it's just the "luck of the draw" as to whether you have pleasure or pain. And in the end, all is meaningless.

But if you get the “above the sun” viewpoint, and see life from the *divine* perspective, it’s a whole different story. We don’t know our future, but we know that *God* knows our future. And He not only *knows* the future - He *controls* the future! God is sovereign. God has appointed all of life’s times and events. He is in complete control, and He has good reasons for everything He allows to happen.

In Scripture, the Lord has given us the “big picture”: creation, humanity’s fall into sin, God’s wonderful plan of salvation, the coming earthly kingdom of Christ, and the eternal future of Heaven and hell. But God has deliberately chosen not to explain all His reasons behind every event that happens - on the global scale, or on the personal level. Often things look very inconsistent. Solomon observed: “*A righteous man perishes in his righteousness, and a wicked man prospers in his wickedness*” (v15). We know what he means. We’ve all seen examples of this.

Because we have a limited knowledge of what God allows – or why he allows it, and because we don’t know what a day will bring forth, and because we don’t have a blueprint for life, we need godly counsel for how to live life properly, and how to avoid the pitfalls of life. And God gives us His counsel through His Word, including Ecclesiastes 7. We studied some good counsel in the first half of the chapter, and there’s more godly counsel in the second half of the chapter - especially what to *avoid* in order to live a godly life.

## Doctrinal Point

**God gives the believer advice for what to avoid in life.**

### **a. Avoid extremes.**

The emphasis in verses 16-18 is to ***avoid extremes***. Solomon’s point here is ***not*** “allow yourself to practice a little sin as long as you don’t lead a totally sinful lifestyle”! No - far from it! His point is to ***practice moderation***.

Excessive righteousness leads to a pharisaical spirit: self-righteousness, and perfectionism, and legalism, and a critical and unforgiving spirit. The Pharisees of our Lord’s day practiced excessive righteousness, observing all kinds of legalistic, man-made, “religious” regulations, and they criticized everyone who didn’t observe their rules. Excessive righteousness can even lead to extreme asceticism - and it certainly leads to frustration!

Here’s an illustration: The other day I parked outside the library in a ten-minute parking zone. I glanced at my watch when I returned and realized that I had been in that parking place for twelve minutes. As a Christian, what should I do? Should I go to the town hall and apologize, and ask what fine I owe? Should I call the police and request a ticket? No, I practiced

Ecclesiastes 7:16. I didn't worry about it. I don't destroy myself with worry, and loss of sleep, and get ulcers about this 2-minute trifle.

But it would be wrong if I took Solomon's counsel for moderation to the other extreme, and started to park in a No Parking zone, or if I "forgot" to pay parking tickets, etc. Many other examples of this principle could be given. Godly counsel is: practice balance and moderation, and avoid extremes (but make sure you avoid wrongdoing!)

## **b. Avoid revenge.**

The emphasis in verses 19-22 is to avoid revenge. There are many situations in life in which it's easy to "fly off the handle" - such as when we overhear someone criticizing us unfairly behind our backs (v21). We need to practice self-control and restraint. And we need to avoid taking revenge!

The wisdom of godly counsel gives us the strength to avoid revenge because we realize that no one is perfect (v19-20). And we should remember that we ourselves are not guiltless in this area! Have there *never* been *any* occasions when we have criticized others and put them down behind their backs (verse 22)?

## **c. Avoid temptation.**

Let's group verses 23-26 under the subtitle "***avoid temptation.***" In verses 23-25, Solomon acknowledged that wisdom is not easy to attain, and even though he was the wisest man who ever lived, it was beyond him to fathom all the mysteries of life. But one thing is sure: if you're wise in God's sight, you will avoid temptation.

In verse 26 the temptation is in a sexual context, but it certainly can be applied to any temptation to sin. To yield to temptation is folly – it is the way of a fool. To resist and avoid temptation is the way of wisdom, and this way of living pleases God.

## **d. Avoid pedestals.**

Verses 27- 28 could easily be misinterpreted. "*Here is what I have found,*" says the Preacher, "*Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found.*"

What is Solomon saying here? Was he a male chauvinist? No, that was not his point. Proverbs 31 shows us that Solomon highly valued women who live wisely. Solomon's point was that truly wise and upright people are few and far between, and he used a cultural way to state that truth.

One commentator paraphrased verse 28 this way: “I have found very few people who please God. No one at all, really.” So, the wise counsel from these verses would be to avoid putting people up on pedestals, because we’re bound to be disappointed. This holds true not only in politics but in the church as well. Avoid putting people on pedestals!

In summary of this second half of Ecclesiastes 7: avoid extremes, avoid revenge, avoid temptation, and avoid pedestals. God gives believers good advice on what to avoid in life.

## **Practical Application:**

### **Watch out for “worldly explanations.”**

Verse 29: “*Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes [or devices, or explanations, or philosophies].*”

The Hebrew word that’s translated “schemes” can also be translated “explanations” (and “explanations” is used in some translations of the Bible). The point of the verse is that *people* are the problem, *not God!* God made the human race upright, but men and women have gone away from God to do their own thing. They have developed their own “schemes” - their own explanations, their own philosophies.

People without the wisdom and knowledge of God’s Word twist and distort the truth and divine revelation to justify what they want to do and think. And they create a “God in their own image” as part of the package – a “god” that allows them to do what they want to do. They come up with their own “explanations.”

We need to be warned about these worldly viewpoints and philosophies and explanations, because it’s very easy to mix these things in with what the Bible teaches, and then end up with syncretism – a toxic mixture of truth and error. Theistic evolution and so-called “divine big bang” theory are just two of many examples that could be given here.

So be careful! Watch out for “worldly explanations.”