

Don't Be a Know it All!

Wisdom is the principal thing;
therefore get wisdom:
and with all thy getting get understanding.

Proverbs 4:7

Solomon continues his rather melancholy sermon about life with a section of proverbial or wise sayings. He seems to be arguing that present grief and pain may be more beneficial to the godly than the festivity and fun that a worldly, prosperous person enjoys.

Practical Wisdom (7:1-14)

The first part of the chapter deals with practical advice for daily living. Note that many of the proverbs carry the "this is better than that because" scheme. Read verses 1-10 and fill out the table below. If no "because" is given in the verse, try to think of a biblical reason the proverb is true.

This	Is better than	That	Because
A good name	Is better than	precious ointment	<i>A good name lasts longer</i>
Day of one's death	Is better than	Day of one's birth	<i>Death ends all struggles and pain</i>
To go to the house of mourning	Is better than	To go to the house of feasting	Death is the end of all men The living will learn from it
Sorrow	Is better than	Laughter	A sad face may make the heart feel better
to hear the rebuke of the wise	Is better than	To hear the song of fools	The laughter of fools is vanity (like a crackling fire)
The end of a thing	Is better than	The beginning of a thing	<i>At the end you quit</i>
A patient spirit	Is better than	A proud spirit	<i>Patience produces peace; pride produces conflict</i>

Verse 4 states that it's better to be in the house of mourning than in the house of mirth (or pleasure).

Why do you think this is the case?

1. *The house of mourning (e.g., a hospital or funeral home) is a more needy place—you can do more good there*
2. *Being in the presence of sickness and death tends to make us think seriously and soberly about our own lives*
3. *Wise people don't spend much time on mirth and pleasure—they have better things to do than please themselves all the time.*

Verse 5 indicates that rebuke is a good thing. What is rebuke? *To express one's disapproval; to reprimand; to tell someone his error with a view toward fixing it.*

What do the following verses say about the benefits of rebuke?

- Psalms 141:5 *Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.*
- Proverbs 9:8 *Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.*
- Prov. 15:31 *The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.*
- Prov. 15:32 *He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.*
- Prov. 17:10 *A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.*

Summarize what the above verses say about rebuke.

Rebuke is good and kind, an indication of love. Wise people pay attention to rebuke. Fools don't learn from rebuke.

The next four verses express wisdom on a variety of topics. Summarize the verses below.

- 7 Extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- 8 *Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*
- 9 *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.*
- 10 *Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.*

Read verses 11-12.

How is wisdom like money?

It provides a shelter and a defense. It's beneficial and profitable.

Why is wisdom better than money?

Wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

Character Wisdom (7:15-22)

Starting with verse 15, Solomon advises his readers to see things from God's point of view rather than their own.

What perplexing situation did Solomon see (.15)?

A righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

Why is this perplexing?

It should be the other way around—the righteous should be rewarded and the wicked should be punished.

How do you explain such a problem?

1. *We live in a fallen world in which rewards and punishments are not neatly handed out.*
2. *We don't know the extent of punishment and reward. The wicked appear to prosper now; they won't later.*
3. *God has His own reasons for doing what He does. We won't always understand why God does what He does.*
4. *Those who appear to be righteous may be hypocrites who deserve the judgment they receive.*

Read verses 16 through 18.

This is perhaps one of the most puzzling and misinterpreted passages of the whole book. Solomon seems to be advising that we take the middle way between holiness and wickedness. What's wrong with such an idea? *Other passages tell us that we should be as righteous/holy as possible. God hates lukewarmness (Rev 3:16).*

How do we resolve this difficulty?

Verses 16 is likely describing a self-righteous, external kind of false holiness and wisdom—your own righteous acts and your own sense of wisdom (c.f. Prov 3:7). Such hypocrisy destroys (c.f. Matt 5:20). In .18, the "this" that one should grasp is the true, Godly wisdom that comes from the fear of God.

What is the point in verses 20-22?

No one is without sin—we are not righteous. Don't worry about the accusations and criticisms of others toward you, because you are as guilty as they are.

Conclusions on Wisdom (7:23-29)

The last section of this chapter presents more difficulties. Read the passage and summarize what Solomon is saying.

He tried to be wise and search out difficult things, but he was unable.

Those who fear God will avoid the ungodly woman.

A good man is hard to find, but a good woman is even more rare.

God made man good, but they have perverted themselves. "Inventions" (KJV) = schemes or devices.

Is Solomon attacking women here? How are we to understand this?

Solomon's problem was not that he hated women. He obviously knew Israel's history and recognized the contributions of many women of the past. In fact, throughout Proverbs, he characterizes wisdom as a woman (1:20). But he also talks about the "strange woman" (Prov 1-9) who seduces the foolish to sin. So this seems to be what he's doing here—personifying foolishness and sin as a woman who leads people astray.

Excellent Sentiments from Ecclesiastes 7:

1. It's better to think about life *seriously* than to drown out sorrow with entertainment. Grief and pain may be more *beneficial* to the godly than festivity and fun.
2. We must avoid the self-righteous, hypocritical, external form of holiness. True godliness and wisdom leads to confession of sin.
3. We must see the *foolishness* of sin as a trap to avoid. The wise person is a rare find; we must strive to be that rare person.

For Further Discussion:

1. *How can sorrow be beneficial?*

Grief and sorrow may strengthen us and give us experience to help others.

2. *How do you know when you should rebuke someone?*

1. *A rebuke must be based on biblical principle, not on preferences*
2. *You must have the proper position or authority (in some cases)*
3. *You must do it in the right spirit—not anger or self-righteousness, but humility.*