

“Grace Towards Others”
Ecclesiastes 7:19-22
(October 8, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We've been looking at the second half of the **Chapter 7**, which contains some of the most difficult passages in the Book of Ecclesiastes.
Some are challenging as we seek to determine what Solomon is trying to teach us.
2. Last week we focused on **Verses 16-17** which are among those very difficult verses. Solomon seems to be pushing us to apply wisdom in order to properly discern righteousness. Righteousness is a good thing, but there are ways righteousness can be misunderstood and misapplied. There are many dangers and it demands great wisdom and discernment.
3. As we continue with **Verse 19** Solomon again takes us on a survey of wisdom. Thankfully, this passage is a little more straight forward and easier to comprehend.
Ecclesiastes 7:19 NAU - "Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city."
4. Wisdom will serve us well and must be highly desired. Solomon said wisdom was to be more desired than silver or gold. In fact, in Proverbs he declared nothing else can compare with wisdom.
Proverbs 3:13-15 NAU - "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding. ¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. ¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her."
5. Philip Ryken describes wisdom well: "The wise person knows how to think about things in a God-centered way. Wisdom governs the will; so the wise person knows what choices to make in life. Wisdom governs speech; so the wise person knows what to say and what not to say. Wisdom governs action; so the wise person knows what to do in any and every situation. Take hold of wisdom, and it will make you strong."¹
6. In the following verses Solomon is going to give us some wise counsel on interpersonal relationships. How should we receive what others say about us? How should we respond when others offend us? This counsel is timeless. It is as much needed today as it was 3000 years ago. Offences are bound to come. People can speak words that hurt. How are we to respond?
The Bible has much to say with regard to patience, forgiveness, and forbearance. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13
Love . . . "is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,"
Love . . . "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."
7. Solomon adds much wisdom to the subject.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 172.

- I. The first overarching word of wisdom is in **Verse 20**: There is no one upon the earth without sin – including us.
 "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins."
- A. Solomon is talking about the total, complete, universal corruption of mankind.
1. Human beings are able to do some good things. Things that are beneficial for themselves and their fellow man. But he is incapable of always doing good and never sinning. No one is righteous.
 Paul writes in Romans 3, "There are none righteous, no not one."
 And since our good works are tainted by sin, they are sinful works.
 2. Solomon says in **Verse 29** that although God created man upright they have instead followed their devices – the word refers to schemes. Human beings have corrupted hearts. Every man does that which is according to his own wicked heart.
 3. Until the disease is known a proper remedy will be out of reach. Until there is acknowledgement of infection, a cure will not be sought.
 4. This is why the Gospel is so easily disregarded. It doesn't become good news until the sinner becomes desperate. As a man slipping closer and closer to the edge of a cliff cries out with greater intensity.
 5. We are all in need of God's grace and mercy, but we have to recognize our helplessness and unworthiness.
 It's like the poor tax collector who felt he was unworthy of God's blessings.
Luke 18:13 NAU - "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'"
 6. God's grace is of infinite value. It is the greatest of treasures. If we have received God's great grace how much should we be willing to show grace towards others?
- B. When we take offence we are presuming that we are sinless and since we are without sin some grave injustice has been done.
1. Solomon is reminding us that when we are harmed it is the case of one sinner wounded another sinner.
 2. Since we are corrupt why would we think we deserve kind treatment from others?
 3. Jesus often taught on the unreasonableness of our self-righteousness.
 - a. He describes a man walking around with this huge hideous beam sticking out of his eye calling attention to the specks in the eyes of others.
Matthew 7:3-5 NAU - "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵ "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

- b. Jesus told the parable of a servant forgiven a massive debt who then demands full payment from his fellow servant.
Matthew 18:23-35
 - 1. The first servant owed ten thousand talents
This was an incredible sum. A talent was valued at no less than 6000 denarii.
 - a. A denarii was equivalent to an average day's pay. It would take an average laborer a thousand weeks just to earn one talent. This person owed 10 thousand talents. Even if the laborer were able to save all of the money he earned he could not be expected to earn more than 10 talents in a lifetime.
This servant owed 10,000 talents – it would take over 1000 lifetimes.
 - b. The point is that it was a debt too large to ever be satisfied. Our sin is an infinite sum.
 - 2. The comparative insignificant amount he was owed by his fellow servant – it amounted to 1/600,000th of the debt he had been forgiven. Debts against us cannot compare to the amount we have committed against God.
 - a. His lack of mercy - "took him by the throat"
 - b. In his pride he considered himself just in his actions – after all he was owed a debt
 - c. Most consider themselves justified in demanding full justice against their neighbor
 - C. The nature of God's grace is God has abundantly given us what we do not deserve.
 - 1. Those who have experienced God's grace should be quick to show grace, to be gracious towards others, even when they are behaving in uncomely ways.
 - 2. Graceless people are demonstrating that they know nothing of grace. People who refuse to forgive others demonstrate they know nothing of forgiveness.
- II. The second word of wisdom is it is wise to look the other way rather than taking offense.
- A. Solomon describes words spoken against us.
Ecclesiastes 7:21 NAU - "Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you."
 - 1. They may be unjust, untrue. They may be words that are hurtful and unkind. Our first reaction is often that of hurt followed by anger or thoughts of retaliation.
 - 2. Some take offense at every tiny offense.
 - a. We use the expression, they have a chip on their shoulder. It refers to someone who is always ready to take offense because of some perceived injustice.
 - b. The flipside is the expression, "thick skinned." They are not easily offended.

3. In **Chapter 4** Solomon called attention to the endless cases of oppression upon the earth. What a grace to be able to declare, “No offense taken.” This is the attitude of grace.
- B. We shouldn’t take the words of others too seriously.
1. Solomon gives wise counsel – we don’t need to know everything everyone is saying. This is wise counsel for pastors. But it is also wise counsel for all.
Charles Bridges: “Listeners, standing upon the tip-toe of suspicion, seldom hear good of themselves.”²
 2. Can you imagine the curse of being able to read the thoughts of others? People can be cruel. Words can hurt. The tongue can be like a sharp dagger. Some use it like a terrible weapon.
But we don’t need to know everything people say.
 3. When others criticize us we need to examine ourselves in light of Christ. What does He think?
1 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. ⁴ For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord."
 - a. Their criticism may be justified whereby we need to repent. But our ultimate Judge is Christ.
 - b. We also need to be wise in how we receive their compliments. We are easily puffed up in pride.
- C. We need to examine our own heart.
1. We often accuse and condemn others for the very things we do.
Romans 2:3 NAU - "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God?"
We take great pleasure in exposing the shortcomings of others while excusing ourselves for the same behavior.
 2. Shall we be offended when others talk about us when we do the same thing?
Ecclesiastes 7:22 NAU - "For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others."
 3. To our shame, all of us have said things behind people’s backs that we would never say to their face.
Or, how many times have we’ve said things out of frustration that would have been better left unsaid?

² Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of the Book of Ecclesiastes* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 215–216.

Conclusion:

1. Once again, the Bible reminds us of the power of words and the danger of our tongues. We need to guard what we say about others, and we need to be content to remain ignorant of what others are saying about us.
Desiring to be the “fly on the wall” is not wise thinking.
2. We need to be slow to take offense. Solomon reminds us that those who take offense close their eyes to the many times they have offended.
Ecclesiastes 7:22 NAU - "For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others."
3. We should always be ready to forgive.
Mark 11:25-26 NAU - "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. ²⁶ *"But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."*
4. When Jonathan Edwards was not yet 20 years old he penned 70 principles that he wanted to be his lifelong compass of life. We know them as the Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards. Number 31 follows what we read here in Ecclesiastes 7.
It would be an excellent life-long principle for us all to follow.
31. Resolved, never to say anything at all against anybody, but when it is perfectly agreeable to the highest degree of Christian honor, and of love to mankind, agreeable to the lowest humility, and sense of my own faults and failings, and agreeable to the golden rule; often, when I have said anything against anyone, to bring it to, and try it strictly by the test of this Resolution.