

A Time for Everything under Heaven #7

Ecclesiastes 3:7; Proverbs 10:19

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There are those who would agree that a lasting joy and happiness cannot be found in the wealth, pleasures, and attainments of this world. They would decry all such crass materialism. However, turning from such materialism, they look for a lasting joy and happiness in earthly relationships with people. Relationships are everything to these people. They truly are more concerned for people than they are for fame, fun, and fortune. Their whole life is wrapped up with developing and improving relationships with family and friends. They could seem to care less about losing \$1,000, but they would fall apart to lose a close family member or friend due to a bitter disagreement. Rather than their happiness being directly tied to their finances, their happiness in this life is directly tied to their family and friends.

Although this relationship-oriented person may seem to have an outlook beyond himself, it in no wise brings him closer to finding a lasting joy and peace in this life than the wealth-oriented person. Why? Because his/her hopes and dreams, his/her joy and happiness, his/her peace and contentment are finally dependent upon that which is earthly, that which can perish and be taken away. When relationships are going well, these people are on top of the world. When relationships have soured, these people are distraught and overcome with depression. These people have moved beyond themselves (which is good), but they have not moved beyond this world to find a lasting joy and happiness (which is bad).

Today we shall see that God teaches us through His inspired author, Solomon, that we cannot make people (whether family, loved ones, or friends) the source of our joy. For there are TIMES OF RENDING of relationships, and there are TIMES OF SEWING UP those relationships. If your state of joy is ultimately dependent upon earthly relationships, then enduring joy will always be a fleeting vapor that is here today and gone tomorrow. For none of us enjoys uninterrupted joy with any human being. Dear ones, we are all sinners, and we sin against one another. We sinfully hurt one another with our actions and our words. Dear ones, the only joy that will carry us through every trial of life is THE JOY OF THE LORD.

Now to be sure, family and friends are a great blessing to us from God. We are commanded by the Lord Jesus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). In fact, we will not know the joy of the Lord in this life if we do not seek by God's grace to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, AND to love our neighbor as our self. Thus, one is not more mature or godly who completely turns his back upon all earthly relationships. In fact, such a view actually is condemned by Christ (Matthew 15:3-6) and by Paul (1 Timothy 5:8). There is a problem only when earthly relationships become idolatrous relationships (i.e. relationships that we place above Christ).

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Rending and Times of Sewing (Ecclesiastes 3:7a); (2) God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Silence and Times of Speaking (Ecclesiastes 3:7b).

I. God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Rending and Times of Sewing (Ecclesiastes 3:7a).

A. The most common use of the Hebrew verb that is translated here as "rend" is used in reference to rending or tearing one's garment as an outward sign of inward sorrow and grief (as we see with King Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34:27). However, there is another use of the Hebrew word for "rend" in the Scripture as well. When the Lord described the division that would occur between a king and his people, or a division among the

people of God themselves, He emphasized that division by using the graphic word “rend” (i.e. to tear into pieces).

1. For example, the Lord used this Hebrew word for “rend” in tearing the people of Israel from King Saul (in 1 Samuel 15:28) and from King Solomon (in 1 Kings 11:31, which was realized in Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, when the 10 tribes of Israel left Rehoboam to follow Jeroboam). God’s people would be as divided as pieces of a garment that had been separated one from another. Dear ones, God does ordain and control all times, even when relationships between rulers and their subjects and between people within a nation break down to such an extent that an actual separation occurs. God also ordains all such times when the same tearing of earthly relationships that occurs between a ruler and his subjects also occurs between people in many different relationships (whether it be between parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, members of the Church, loved ones and friends). The idea of rending earthly relationships is the use of the word “rend” that I believe is in view here in Ecclesiastes 3:7. Why? I believe this for the following 3 reasons.

a. Solomon has already addressed times of weeping and mourning over which God is sovereign in Ecclesiastes 3:4. It seems less likely that Solomon would mention the same times of weeping and mourning as he had just mentioned in Ecclesiastes 3:4 than that he would introduce a new and different time of rending and sewing which God sovereignly appoints in our lives (especially since the Hebrew verb “rend” has more than one use in the Scripture).

b. As King Solomon pens the words (“a time to rend”) in Ecclesiastes 3:7, he was an older man (most likely living toward the end of his life) who could write about a time to rend that had been prophesied to come after his death. For God had already prophesied to Solomon that such a time of rending would occur among the people of Israel due to his sin of idolatry (1 Kings 11:9-14,30-32). Thus, a rending of earthly relationships would not be a foreign concept to Solomon at all. In fact, it might be argued that the closer Solomon came to his death such an idea of rending would become more significant to him as he reflected upon it and would become one that he might mention in this context.

c. Finally, the couplet that immediately follows rending and sewing (in Ecclesiastes 3:7) is that of silence and speaking (“a time to keep silence and a time to speak”), which seems to fit very well in matters related to earthly relationships with people. There seems to be a natural progression from severed relationships and renewed relationships to keeping silent and speaking in earthly relationships. A similar progression in thought was likewise evident in Ecclesiastes 3:4 and in Ecclesiastes 3:6.

2. The rending and tearing of earthly relationships speaks not so much of strained relationships, but more of broken relationships. Relationships may grow cool and yet continue as committed relationships. But to rend or to tear a relationship seems much more serious. To tear a relationship into pieces is to end that relationship that once was established (at least to end it for the present time). It is a definite separation, divorce, or excommunication. And just as the word “rend” speaks of an actual separation, so it also speaks of the pain and heartache involved in such a separation. For it is never pleasant to endure the tearing of flesh. And that is what happens when a husband and wife, who are said by God to be one flesh, are torn into pieces, or when members of Christ’s body, who are said to be of one Spirit, are rent into pieces. It must (in the very nature of the case) be painful to tear those relationships into pieces.

3. Now to rend or to tear a relationship between a husband and wife, between loved ones, or between brothers and sisters in Christ is always due to sin on someone’s part (or both parties’ part). For in heaven (where there is no sin), there will be no more rending or tearing of relationships (Revelation 21:4). Think of it. Not only will there be no painful rending of relationships in heaven, but not even any disagreements with anyone in heaven. There will forever be only peace, love, and unity in the truth. And dear ones, it should be our goal to strive at all times (by God’s grace) to promote peace (without compromising truth) in earthly relationships (whether it be with unbelievers, as we see in Romans 12:18, or with believers, as

we see in 1 Corinthians 1:10). Thus, when an earthly relationship is torn into pieces with a family member, friend, or associate, we should seek by God's grace to know who sinned in bringing about this tear: Did I sin? Did he/she sin? Did we both sin? In sizing up such divisions, it is very natural to look first with the accusing finger at the many ways the other person was responsible for the tear (and it may be the case that it is the fault of the other person). However, it is always wrong to begin by looking at others. We should rather always begin with ourselves (humbly praying to God that we might be brutally honest in looking at ourselves) to see what we have done to contribute to the tear in the relationship we have with others (as we see in Matthew 7:3-5). We should pray that our spiritual eyes might be illuminated to see even the slightest offence we have committed, which has contributed to the rending of a relationship. For the Lord calls us to be peacemakers not troublemakers (in Matthew 5:9). And where God shows us sins that we have committed that have led to the tear in a relationship, we must humbly confess our sin to God and go to that person to seek his/her forgiveness (even if the sin or sins we committed are relatively minor in comparison to the sin or sins committed by the other person). Dear ones, sin is sin (whether we view it as great or small). We are commanded to even forsake the necessary duty of worship (temporarily) in order to seek reconciliation with others (according to Christ in Matthew 5:23-24). That's how important reconciliation with one another is according to the Lord Jesus.

4. Dear ones, there is an appointed time in God's providence in which relationships with others will be torn like a piece of fabric. It is inevitable that such divisions will come and that they will come by God's own appointment and for our good (as we see in 1 Corinthians 11:18-19). If this is true in the church, it is also true within the family as well. We must, therefore, never cling to an earthly relationship so tightly that we cannot let it go if it means being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. For the Lord Jesus taught us, it is not only our money and possessions, prestige and fame, pleasure and fun that may take our hearts away from Him, it may also be earthly relationships that will either demonstrate our loyalty to Christ or lack thereof (Matthew 10:34-38).

5. Dear ones, if a tear in an earthly relationship has occurred in your life, can you yet rejoice in the Lord? Can you yet know the peace that passes all understanding? Can the spring of everlasting life yet water the garden of your soul, so that you know the satisfaction and refreshment of the Spirit of God? Absolutely! The Psalmist declares with such confidence, "When my father and my mother forsake me [and he could have added, "when my husband or my wife forsake me", or "when my Christian brother or my Christian sister forsake me", or "when my best friend forsakes me"], then the LORD will take me up" (Psalm 27:10). Our Savior is a friend who is closer to us than even an earthly brother (Proverbs 18:24). He is a father to the fatherless according to Psalm 68:5. Listen to the comforting promise found in Hebrews 13:5-6. This was one of the trials that Paul faced while in prison (according to 2 Timothy 4:16-17). Enemies attacked him, and brothers in Christ forsook him. Yet Paul rejoiced that the Lord stood with him and strengthened him. For even though earthly relationships were torn while he was in prison, he could yet write in the inspired letter of Philippians (written while he was in a Roman prison): "I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:18-19). Dear ones, earthly relationships will come and go. If our hope for happiness and joy is built upon those earthly relationships, we will always live in fear of losing those earthly relationships. Many people have chosen earthly relationships over Jesus Christ, so that they were willing to forsake Christ and His Church rather than to forsake that earthly relationship. You can only know a lasting joy and contentment in this life and forevermore, when your life is not built upon an earthly relationship of sand, but rather is built upon the Lord Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This is the very reason Solomon mentions here in Ecclesiastes 3:7 that there is a time to rend. Not that we might fall into fear and despair over the severing of earthly relationships, but that we might cast ourselves upon Christ, who is alone our source of peace, contentment, and joy, now and for all eternity.

B. Solomon then moves from “a time to rend” to “a time to sew” in Ecclesiastes 3:7.

1. Although we may go through a time to rend an earthly relationship, praise God He also graciously brings into our lives a time to sew earthly relationships together again. Now that is not to say that the specific relationship that has been severed will in fact be renewed in the future, but it is to say that God supernaturally changes the hearts of people by His amazing grace, so that earthly relationships that seemed impossible to sew back together can be mended. That is why we continue to pray publicly for those who have been excommunicated from the church. We believe that God is able to sew us back together with those brethren that have forsaken the truth of Jesus Christ. The purpose of excommunication is not to be mean or vindictive. Excommunication is actually an act of love to erring brethren. It is to say to them, we love you too much to pretend that your sin does not affect your relationship to Christ or to His Church. Paul states that the purpose of excommunication is not that a soul might be damned, but rather “that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5). Dear ones, bitterness, resentment, hatred, or vindictiveness have no place in our hearts, if we would be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Such sin in our own hearts will only make the tear between us and others worse. It will not heal the hurt in your own heart. It will not draw you closer to your Savior. Yes, we must show a righteous indignation with the offense and the offenders, who have sinfully broken covenant with the Lord and His people. For it is a grievous sin to divide the body of Christ. However, we only contribute to that division when our own hearts are filled with bitterness and hatred. We ourselves only become a part of the problem, rather than a part of the solution. May the Lord break our own hearts to see that if it were not for His tender mercies to us in restraining us from sin, we would do precisely (and far worse) to others than what others have done to us. Dear ones, while we wait for reconciliation with erring brethren, it is not a time to be proud, boastful, and arrogant. It is a time to be humbled, a time to be broken and contrite before the Lord, a time to rejoice in the Lord’s mercies to us, and a time to pray for the sewing together of torn relationships. Beloved, that is what will make heaven, heaven. There will be no more divisions, separations, or tearing of relationships. There will be no more shedding of tears or cries of anguish over broken relationships. There will be no sin that needs to be confessed. Imagine this! We will never have to go to another person again to say, “Please forgive me for my anger, for my envy, for my pride, or for my bitterness.” We will enjoy perfect fellowship with Christ and with all the saints forever and ever. Heaven is the ultimate time of sewing together. Even so come Lord Jesus.

II. God Has Ordained and Controls Times of Silence and Times of Speaking (Ecclesiastes 3:7b).

A. God divinely appoints times of silence in our earthly relationships with people. When do such times of silence occur? Let me suggest some of those times of silence.

1. When grief and sorrow is great (Job 2:13). It is usually not a good time to rattle on with many words when people are suffering from great loss. Sometimes simply a hug, a hand on the shoulder, a look of sympathy, sincere tears, a prepared meal, or some other act of kindness will communicate more comfort than an eloquent speech to one whose heart is breaking. They will come near remembering the simple acts of sympathy and kindness than all of the many words spoken. Simply being there for someone, being near them, being available for them is a great comfort. Those who are grieving may need someone to listen to them more than they need someone to talk to them.

2. When should there be times of silence in our lives? One such time is when others are talking (Job 29:21). It is not a time to interrupt when others are talking. It is a time to listen. It says we care about that person when we listen. On the other hand, it says we only care about ourselves when we continually interrupt while others are talking. The best communicators are the best listeners. We should want to hear what others are saying. It will tell us how we can best help them and minister to them.

3. When should there be times of silence in our lives? Another time is when God speaks to

us by His Word and Spirit (Nehemiah 8:2-3). When God speaks to us by His Word we ought to be listening—we ought to be attentive. It is a sign of great respect for God when we are quiet and attentive during the reading and preaching of His Word (not sleeping, but attentive). For, dear ones, a faithful minister is the ambassador of Jesus Christ, proclaiming the message that God has for you. There will no doubt be some sermons that you believe speak more directly to you than others, but all faithful sermons (even those that are not among the top ten best sermons you have ever heard) are God's Word to you.

4. When should there be times of silence in our lives? Finally, another time is when we don't know what to say (Proverbs 10:19; James 1:19). Many people say whatever comes to their mind when they don't know what to say. Like Peter they are rash and quick to speak (Mark 9:5-6). Actually, people will come nearer to thinking us wise when we are silent (especially when it comes to a subject that we do not know much about), than when we demonstrate by our many words how little we really do know.

5. Let us not only learn to be wise in our speech as Christians, who are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, but let us also learn to be wise in our silence as well.

B. Finally, Solomon declares that there is a time to speak as well—a time that is appointed by God in His providence. Let me suggest a few such times.

1. It is a time to speak when we can offer comforting words to those who are facing distressing trials and afflictions (2 Corinthians 1:4).

2. It is a time to speak when we can share our faith with others (1 Peter 3:15).

3. It is a time to speak when we defend the good name of others that are slandered (Proverbs 22:1).

4. It is a time to speak when we can communicate our love to one another in WORD and DEED (1 John 3:18). Yes, love must be communicated in deed, but it should also be communicated in word as well. "I love you" is not an expensive gift to purchase, but it can make another person feel very rich. Of course, along with these words, there ought also to follow the deeds as well.

5. It is a time to speak when we confess sin to one another and forgive one another (James 5:16).

Earthly relationships, are a blessing from God. However, let us never forget that nurturing and enjoying our relationship with Jesus Christ is the only way we will truly enjoy all earthly relationships. A lasting joy can never be found in that which is changeable or perishable (as are all earthly relationships). A lasting joy can only be found in Christ who never changes—whose covenant with us is built upon promises that can never change and a love that can never wax or wane. He who knows the worst about us has loved us from everlasting to everlasting. Our love for Him can grow or be diminished, but His covenant love for us cannot increase or decrease. It is as unchangeable as is His own holy character. When we are safe and secure in that unchangeable love and covenant of Jesus Christ, no rending of earthly relationships can take away that joy of the Lord. Receive that love of Jesus Christ today, and you will stand even if you are passing through the rending of some earthly relationship right now. As important as is your wife or husband, your children or parents, your brother or sister, or your best friend, could you live without them and yet be filled with joy in this life? Can you say with joy in your heart, "For to me to live is Christ." What is it that is your life? Earthly relationships or Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ is the only One in whom you will find true joy. If you find yourself all over the map due to earthly relationships, it is because you have forgotten or never known that Christ alone is your life and reason for living.

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