

“A Good Reputation”
Ecclesiastes 7:1-4
(Preached at Trinity, August 27, 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 citations 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. Solomon has been giving many examples of the vanity of this world, especially when we aspire to live our lives without God. Now, as we enter **Chapter 7** Solomon will give some wisdom on how to counter some of these examples of vain living. In a book that thus far has been a series of grievances, Solomon the preacher will provide us with some words of wisdom.
 - A. Ecclesiastes is in the genre of wisdom literature and **Chapter 7** is consistent with the genre. It extols the value of wisdom.
Ecclesiastes 7:11 NAU - "Wisdom along with an inheritance is good And an advantage to those who see the sun."
 - B. The opening verses of **Chapter 7** sound a lot like the Book of Proverbs. They contain short, pithy statements of wisdom.
Most agree that **Chapter 7** is the most difficult chapter in this difficult book.
2. Solomon first sets before us the importance of a good reputation.
Ecclesiastes 7:1 NAU - "A good name is better than a good ointment, And the day of *one's* death is better than the day of one's birth."
 - A. Solomon says a good reputation is better than a good ointment.
 1. The NIV translates it "perfume." The point is the great value.
 2. It reminds us of the anointing of Jesus.
Mark 14:3-5 NAU - "While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining *at the table*, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; *and* she broke the vial and poured it over His head. ⁴ But some were indignantly *remarking* to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? ⁵ "For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and *the money* given to the poor." And they were scolding her."
 3. The great worth of a good name is stressed in Proverbs 22
Proverbs 22:1 NAU - "A *good* name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold."
 - B. Solomon adds to his argument that the day of a man's death is better than the day of his birth.
 1. The day of our birth is a day of celebration.
 - a. Now days the entire process is celebratory. The announcement of conception is often made with great joy. Photos of the sonogram are shared with everyone – although to the untrained eye there really isn't much to see.

- b. Some have gender reveal parties where the colors of pink and blue become very significant.
 - c. And then there is finally the birth when the parents rejoice at the new addition to the family and happiness abounds.
 - d. We continue to mark the special day with the annual commemoration of our birthday.
2. Solomon reminds us that the day of our death is actually much more significant. On the day of our birth our life is a clean slate. Our character has not yet been revealed. Martin Luther King remarked in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech –
- “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”*
- But on the day of our birth there is no content to our character.
3. It’s a very different situation on the day of our death. This day is preceded by a life, a life where our character has been on display. We have established a reputation. What kind of reputation have we left behind? How will we be remembered?
4. This is also the emphasis of **Verses 2-4.**
- Ecclesiastes 7:2 NAU** - "It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes *it* to heart."
- a. The house of mourning refers to a funeral.
 - b. At funerals the living are able to assess the life of the deceased. They are able to look at his reputation. “And the living takes *it* to heart."
 - c. Sorrow is better than laughter because laughter does not instruct. It doesn’t lead to contemplation. Matthew Henry describes it: “it will do us more good to go to a funeral than to go to a festival.”¹
3. The Bible often stresses the importance of our reputation and I’ve preached on the subject many times. On the one hand, the only opinion that ultimately counts is that of Jesus at His judgment. Paul made this abundantly clear.
- Romans 14:4 NAU** - "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."
- Romans 14:10 NAU** - "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."
- 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."
4. On the other hand, our reputation before this world is of great importance. A good reputation is one of the standards for leadership in the church.

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1042.

- A. We can see this among the qualifications for pastor – he must have a good reputation both inside the church and out.
1 Timothy 3:2 NAU - "An overseer, then, must be above reproach"
1 Timothy 3:7 NAU - "And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*"
 The office of pastor is reserved for those who have been found faithful. Their character is an important element in their qualifications.
2 Timothy 2:2 NAU - "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
- B. This is also true for deacons:
Acts 6:3 NAU - "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task."
1 Timothy 3:10 NAU - "These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach."
- C. It is also a qualification for how we distribute benevolence in the church.
1 Timothy 5:9-10 NAU - "A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, *having been* the wife of one man, ¹⁰ having a reputation for good works; *and* if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, *and* if she has devoted herself to every good work."
5. All of us should strive to maintain an excellent reputation. Solomon is saying that one of the cures for the vanity of living our life is careful attention upon how we live our life. What kind of reputation do we have?
- I. A good reputation before men should be something we place a high value upon
- A. An excellent character is a crown to be worn with distinction
1. We can see this with the excellent wife in **Proverbs 31**
Proverbs 31:29-31 NAU - "Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all." ³⁰ Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *But* a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. ³¹ Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates."
 2. An excellent reputation takes years to build, but only a moment to lose. I have often reminded people of this with regard to trust. Husbands and wives trust one another because of years of faithfulness. Parents have confidence in trustworthy children.
 3. Parents need to recognize the importance of their reputations before their children. "Thomas Carlyle said of his poor, uneducated father that he was prouder to bear his pedigree than he would be that of a duke or a king; 'for what is the glory of mere rank or accidental station compared with the glory of Godlike qualities, and of a character that reflects the image of God Himself.'"²

² Phillips, Richard. *1 Samuel, Reformed Expository Commentary*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012, Page 184.

4. Since our reputation can be tarnished so easily it should cause all of us to live with caution.

The Bible uses strong words on this. We are to flee from all sin.

1 Corinthians 6:18 NAU - "Flee immorality. "

1 Corinthians 10:14 NAU - "flee from idolatry."

2 Timothy 2:22 NAU - "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

- B. It is also important for our church to have an excellent reputation

1. This is most difficult because often those who are corrected or leave disgruntled often slander the church.

The best defense against slander is an excellent character.

1 Peter 2:12 NAU - "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation."

2. A reputation for good works and graciousness overcomes all slander. People learn our excellent character through personal experience.

3. The NT holds several churches before us as examples.

- a. Rome was a church with many members whose reputation was well known

Romans 1:8 NAU - "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."

- b. Paul spoke of the excellent reputation of the Church of Thessalonica

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 NAU - "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

- c. Paul wrote of the churches in Macedonia and their reputation for generosity .

2 Corinthians 8:3-4 NAU - "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord, ⁴ begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,"

4. We should always be mindful of our reputation as a church. What kind of reputation does our church have? When others look at our church what do they see?

5. The church is made up of individuals. What effect does your membership have on our church's reputation? Do you enhance the church's reputation? Does your life paint a positive reputation for our church?

- II. As important as our reputation is before men, how much more important is a good reputation before God.
- A. Faithfulness is simply faith in practice
1. Jesus asked an important question:
Luke 18:8 NAU - "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"
 Jesus is asking more than will the Son of Man find Christians on the earth. There is no doubt about this. Rather, He's asking, "Will He find His people living faithfully."
 As William Hendriksen wrote: "The question is asked for the purpose not of speculation but of self-examination. Let each answer for himself."³
 2. Paul described the necessity of faithfulness
1 Corinthians 4:1-2 NAU - "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy." KJV, ESV - "that a man be found faithful."
 3. Jesus told of the excellent servant
Luke 19:17 NAU - "Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities."
- B. It is important to have a good reputation before men. But they are not our final judge.
1. Perhaps, before men we can conceal our evil character. Sometimes men are able to fool others with a counterfeit reputation. This is how swindlers are often able to rob people of their life savings.
 2. Jesus cannot be fooled. He knows the true measure of our reputation. How does He see you?

Conclusion:

1. May we always seek to maintain an excellent reputation
 There are character traits that are sorely lacking in our generation.
 Faithfulness, loyalty, trustworthiness and reliability, honesty and integrity
2. May God give all of us a reputation of holiness and good works. May we demonstrate with our lives the faith we profess.
 A.W. Pink said, "A Christian's punctuality, his truthfulness, his conscientiousness, the quality of his work, his devotion to his employer's interests, ought to be so apparent that there is no need for him to let others know by his lips that he is a disciple of Christ."
 Or to put it more simply as Douglas O'Donnell puts it,
 "We should be ambitious to make a good name for ourselves by glorifying God's name on earth."⁴

³ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 818.

⁴ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Ecclesiastes*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 134.