

“Wise Counsel”
Ecclesiastes 7:5-6
(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. He has been consistent with his opening statement. He gives us the summary of his sermon:
Ecclesiastes 1:2 NAU - "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."
2. In the opening verses of **Chapter 7** Solomon gives some wisdom on how to counter some of these examples of vain living. Ecclesiastes is in the genre of wisdom literature and the opening verses of the second half of the book Solomon is true to the genre as Solomon makes short, pithy statements of wisdom.
3. The first part of **Chapter 7** sounds a lot like the Book of Proverbs.
Verses 1-4 proverbs on the meaning of life and death
Verses 5-6 describe the great contrast between a wise rebuke verses foolish laughter.
Verses 7-10 describe patiently waiting upon God.
This is followed in **Verses 11-12** by a brief summary on the value of wisdom.
4. Solomon begins by setting 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 describes attending a funeral. Funerals are a time for reflection upon a life. One's reputation is remembered, for better or worse.
 - B. This is also the emphasis of **Verse 2**.
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. They are also given opportunity to assess their own lives.
5. Now, as we proceed to **Verses 5-6**, Solomon continues to give brief exhortations of wisdom. The message here is simple, wise counsel is always preferred over the counsel of fools—even if the counsel is in the form of a rebuke. Solomon asked the question in the previous chapter:
Ecclesiastes 6:12 NAU - "For who knows what is good for a man during *his* lifetime, *during* the few years of his futile life?"
Most assume good and pleasure are synonymous. But as we saw, God's Providence is always good. And sometimes it comes in the form of reproof from the lips of a wise man.

6. As we see frequently in wisdom genre, extreme contrast is being used. A rebuke is hard to hear, hard to receive. No one would call it a sweet sound. Solomon contrasts the rebuke with the sweet sound of a song. The words of a wise compared with those of fools.
 7. **Verse 6** continues making the contrast. The fool is full of silliness and mirth, not giving a serious contemplation of life. Their laughter is like thorns under a pot, that burn for a moment, a flash of heat, but soon fade to ashes.
 8. Instead of listening to the empty, silly song of fools who sing sweet things into our ears, we are to receive words of wisdom even when they are hard to receive.
- I. Most people demonstrate their foolishness by embracing the counsel of fools
- A. This is consistent with our fallen nature.
 1. No one wants to be corrected. It is offensive. It smites our pride.
 2. We especially hate correction from God. We hate God and hate his Word. **Psalm 2:1-3 NAU** - "Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"
 3. God's Word exposes and rebukes our sin and we hate this. His warnings have consistently been hated and rejected. **Isaiah 30:9-10 NAU** - "For this is a rebellious people, false sons, Sons who refuse to listen To the instruction of the LORD; ¹⁰ Who say to the seers, "You must not see *visions*"; And to the prophets, "You must not prophesy to us what is right, Speak to us pleasant words, Prophecy illusions."
 4. We much rather hear the sweet songs of this world.
 - B. This is why preaching is so often despised.
 1. It is counsel from the lips of God – "Thus saith the Lord."
 2. They want to hear soft words. Ear tickling words. Pleasant words. **2 Timothy 4:2-4 NAU** - "preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."
 3. Solomon calls them stupid in Proverbs 12
Proverbs 12:1 NAU - "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid."
Proverbs 12:15 NAU - "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel."
 4. It can only lead to misery and destruction

- C. Such foolishness led to the permanent division of Israel
1. After the death of Solomon his son, Rehoboam succeeded him to the throne. He was lacking in experience, so he sought the counsel of the elders.
 - a. They counseled Rehoboam to speak gently with the people. By doing this he could have won their hearts. But Rehoboam was too proud for this. He wanted to flex his muscles.
 - b. The elders counseled Rehoboam to be a servant king. If he would be willing to do this, they would have gladly followed him forever.
 - c. Rehoboam did not heed their words. Instead, he listened to his foolish friends.
1 Kings 12:8 NAU - "But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him."
 2. The counsel of Rehoboam's friends was the song of fools. It was sweet pop music and exactly what he wanted to hear. With his mind already made up it was counsel Rehoboam wanted to hear.
 - a. Too often young people give greater ear to the foolish counsel of their friends than to the sound teaching of their elders. They reject the sound counsel of their parents and are angered at their rebuke. To many, moral and sexual purity seems old-fashioned and out of touch.
 - b. They hate to be corrected. They don't want to hear the rebuke. The world tells us rebuke is bad, especially if it infringes on the lifestyle of others. They call it hate speech. We live in an age of hyper tolerance where no one has the right to oppose another person's choices. And to declare another person to be in sin is unthinkable.
 - c. The Bible calls the one who can receive a rebuke a wise man.
Proverbs 13:1 NAU - "A wise son *accepts his* father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke."
Proverbs 17:10 NAU - "A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool."

- II. Solomon is saying there is great virtue in listening to wise counsel.
- A. The Godly man seeks wise counsel and weighs his decisions carefully.
 1. We must seek God's counsel first and foremost. This must happen before anything else. God's wisdom comes from God's Word.
Proverbs 3:5-6 NAU - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."
Psalms 119:105 NAU - "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."
Psalms 119:99-100 NAU - "I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. ¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts."

2. Then we must seek Godly counsel, counsel from wise and mature Christians who have had their minds shaped by the Word of God. It is too easy to seek counsel from those who will tell us what we want to hear.
 3. Godly counsel is Biblical counsel.
The rebuke of a wise man Solomon is talking about is not vain criticism. It is not unholy words meant to cut and wound.
 - a. They are sound words meant to correct and edify.
Proverbs 27:5-6 NAU - "Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed. ⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."
 - b. They are the words of a friend spoken in love.
Ephesians 4:15 NAU - "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,"
- B. We must be willing to receive wise counsel.
Proverbs 25:12 NAU - "*Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprove to a listening ear."
1. Even when the counsel is in the form of a rebuke. A rebuke can be strong medicine but can lead to spiritual health.
Charles Bridges – “But as many sweet things are poison, so many bitter things are medicine.”¹
 2. Many are not willing to receive counsel that is in conflict with their predetermined plans. They ask for counsel, but they don’t receive it if it conflicts with their plans and desires.
Such people are unteachable. I’ve had a word from Solomon posted at my desk for many years.
Proverbs 23:9 NAU - "Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words."
 3. Many leaders surround themselves with what we call “yes men.” People who will tell them what they want to hear. They are people who dare not speak in conflict with the standard narrative. The wise man will surround himself with people who will tell him the truth, even when it is hard to receive.
 - a. And these brave souls will often be despised. In Israel’s history some of their kings surrounded themselves with false prophets who spoke smooth words. It was the “song of fools.”
 - b. God’s true prophets were often hated and abused. But they spoke the truth.

Conclusion:

1. We need to be wise, brave people who are willing to correct in love, even at the risk of offending.
2. And we need to be wise, humble people, who will receive correction, even when it hurts.

¹ Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of the Book of Ecclesiastes* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 180.

