

A Happy Person Is a Wise Person
Ecclesiastes 7:11-14; Proverbs 3:13-15
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Rev. Greg L. Price

A wise person is one who (by God's grace) applies the truth found in Scripture to his/her life and to the life of others (both the Gospel and the Law). A foolish person is one who ignores, neglects, or despises the truth found in Scripture and does not apply it to his/her life nor to the life of others. The fool may intellectually know what the Bible says about this or that, but there is no desire to love and to obey the truth of Christ. For example, the child that knows the oven is hot, but doesn't apply that knowledge to his life is going to suffer the misery of a burn. Whereas the child that knows the oven is hot, and avoids that oven is going to look for joy in things that will not hurt him. How many different areas of our lives are we acting like that foolish child because we are not or (even worse) will not apply the truth we know because it is too uncomfortable and none of us wants to have an uncomfortable Christian life, because it may cost us a close relationship with family or friends, because it may cost us a promotion at work, or because it may mean we have to sacrifice certain pleasures due to them having become more important to us than the Lord Jesus Himself?

Since God as our Maker has set eternity in our hearts (according to Ecclesiastes 3:11), so that we are made in such a way that the mere pleasures of this life cannot and will never be able to bring a lasting joy or an enduring satisfaction, it only stands to reason that the person who grows (by God's grace) in the knowledge of Christ and who loves, obeys, and applies that knowledge to his/her own life and to the life of others is the one who will know the joy of the Lord to be his/her strength. All those who ignore, neglect, or despise this truth will learn the painful lesson of that foolish child and continue to burn themselves on hot stoves that God has said will ultimately bring misery rather than joy.

Solomon, the wisest mere human being that ever lived, declares to us that wisdom brings happiness and foolishness brings misery. Do you want to be content, satisfied, and happy? Seek and pursue godly wisdom that comes from heaven above. The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Value of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12); (2) The Practice of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:13-14).

I. The Value of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12).

A. Solomon continues in our text today to identify another quality of one who has a good name: wisdom. If you would have a good name and reputation before God and man, you must diligently seek the grace of wisdom that comes from heaven above. There is no way that you will have a good name if you think, speak, and act like a fool. You will have a name (it is true), but it will not be a good name—it will be a name that brings shame to the godly and reproach to the name of Christ. Earnestly and continuously pray that God will grant you a good name that is adorned with a godly sorrow (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4), a teachable heart (Ecclesiastes 7:5-6), a patient spirit (Ecclesiastes 7:7-10), and a heavenly wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:11-14).

B. It should be noted that the wisdom of which Solomon here preaches is not an earthly wisdom that a mere natural man (in an unconverted state) can gain. For this heavenly wisdom is not a personality trait or a temperament with which you are naturally born. This wisdom is a supernatural and undeserved gift of God's amazing grace that is granted to all who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (although it is manifested in varying degrees among the redeemed), and this heavenly wisdom is carefully distinguished from the wisdom of this world in James 3:13-18. Furthermore, wisdom is more than merely filling your head with facts and information. This is not in any way to disparage your growth in the knowledge of Christ; it is simply to say that wisdom applies the knowledge of Christ in every area of life (Hebrews 5:12-14). It is not necessarily the person that has memorized the Shorter Catechism or reads the Bible from cover to

cover every year that is wise (although such knowledge of Divine truth is a necessary foundation upon which wisdom is to be built). It is not necessarily the person that has mastered the works of Luther, Calvin, Knox, Rutherford, or Gillespie that is wise. He may be able to tell you what these faithful and learned teachers said about a point of doctrine, but that is not what makes him wise. What makes him wise is whether the Holy Spirit is graciously taking the truth that he is learning and is sanctifying his heart, his thoughts, his desires, his prayers, his speech, and his behavior. Thus, heavenly wisdom is a Divine grace implanted in the child of God at the time of regeneration, but is increasingly manifested by love and faithful obedience to Christ and His Word. Your example is found in Christ (who in His human nature) “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). In fact, Christ is made unto you wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30). To grow in trust, love, and obedience to Christ is to grow in wisdom.

C. Solomon lists two assets of this heavenly wisdom (in Ecclesiastes 7:11-12) that make it so valuable.

1. Wisdom is good, together with the earthly blessings God has given to you (“Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun” Ecclesiastes 7:11). In fact, a heavenly wisdom is inseparable from the enjoyment of every blessing upon the earth. That is to say that wisdom is very practical. Although its source is heaven, its application is here upon the earth. Whatever you may have by way of earthly prosperity (whether little or much), you need that heavenly wisdom to be able to use and to enjoy what God has given to you. Those who have an earthly wisdom may know how to gain wealth by using the system, but only those who have a heavenly wisdom know how to use their wealth to glorify God, to love their neighbor, and to enjoy God through the gifts He has given to them. Think of some of the blessings you have received from the Lord.

a. You can see with your eyes, but so can those who are not Christians. Whereas the Christian sees with a heavenly wisdom, the non-Christian does not. The Christian sees the power and wisdom of God in creation all about him.

b. You can hear with your ears, but so can those who are not Christians. But as a Christian, you hear with a heavenly wisdom what the non-Christian does not hear in the preaching of God’s Word.

c. You have a job, food, shelter, and clothing, but so do those who are not Christians. But you have the grace to praise God for every crumb that falls from God’s table knowing that you do not even deserve the crumbs let alone to sit at the table with the Lord and feast upon Him (in the preaching of His Word and in the administration of the Lord’s Supper).

d. Dear ones, you do not have to possess much to be wise. Wisdom is not a grace for the rich. It is a grace for the hungry and thirsting child of God (James 1:5-7). Even the crumbs that poor Lazarus, the beggar, ate from the table of the rich man might be counted as reason to be thankful where heavenly wisdom was present (Luke 16:19ff). How much do you crave this heavenly wisdom in your life? Is it a treasure that is more valuable than wealth and riches in your estimation (Proverbs 3:13-15)? Dear ones, without this heavenly wisdom you will be like the prodigal son who obtained his inheritance from his father and thought that an inheritance would bring him happiness. He foolishly sought for joy in money and pleasure. When he had wasted it upon himself, he was driven to eat the food of pigs and was brought to that low estate, so that he might realize that having what he wanted did not equal happiness. Wisdom brings happiness. Foolishness brings misery.

2. A second asset of this heavenly wisdom that makes it so valuable is this: Wisdom is a defense against the trials and afflictions in this life (“For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it” Ecclesiastes 7:12).

a. Literally, the text states that “wisdom is a shadow, and money is a shadow.” Shade beneath a tree from the scorching sun was a defense against the direct sunlight and heat that seemed

to drain the very moisture and life out of the body of a man (especially in an age where there were no air conditioners to cool the body). Solomon here compares wisdom as a defense with money as a defense. Certainly those who possess much wealth are shaded and defended against poverty, against hunger, against illness (because they can more likely afford whatever is needed to care for the body), against enemies (to some degree because they do not have to live in areas that are more susceptible to crime and can hire people to protect them), and against oppressors (for the wealthy are more likely to oppress others than to be oppressed by others). So Solomon recognizes certain benefits to money in preserving the mere physical life of one against various dangers he may face in this life.

b. However, in comparison to the riches of wisdom, the riches of the wealthy are so superficial as a defense and shadow against the greatest enemies we face in this life. In fact money does not and cannot defend us against the enemies of our soul that would cast us into the lake of fire where there is no shade, but where there is rather a continual scorching and burning that will never end for all eternity. Solomon states that wisdom is so much more valuable than money because “wisdom giveth life to them that have it” (Ecclesiastes 7:12). No amount of money in the world can carry a person across the threshold of death and into the land where there is no more pain, sorrow, tears, temptation, sin, trials, afflictions, or death. Think with me of the enemies from which the grace of wisdom will defend you.

(1) Wisdom will defend you from the fear of evil (Proverbs 1:33). What a prison it is to live in fear of someone or of something that you feel is going to crush you: fear of pestilence, disease, poverty, war, persecution for the truth, loss of a job, lust, anger (or other besetting sins), people, death, and hell. Wisdom is filled with faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Wisdom faces the future, not shuddering and shaking in one’s boots, but with a confident smile, knowing that there is ultimately no evil that can befall those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; for the Lord has removed the evil out of all afflictions and trials, so that everything occurs for our good (Romans 8:28). God even ordains that all our enemies become as it were our greatest friends in growing us in an ever-increasing faith in Christ. For dear ones, it is by these very trials that we grow in overcoming the fear and distress we have of them. It is by being uncomfortable that we learn to find our comfort in Christ. It is by being weak that we find our strength in Christ. It is by being foolish that we find our wisdom in Christ. It is by falling into sin that we find that only the Lord can lift us out of the pit and plant our feet upon the path of righteousness. It is by fear that we find our courage in Christ. It was that young faithful covenant minister, James Renwick, that wrote,

Count your antagonists your greatest friends, for what are they doing by all the storms they raise against you, but contributing to the mass of your glory? O fear them not, but keep your Captain-general upon your right hand, and then cry to them to shoot to their fill (*The Life And Letters Of James Renwick*, W.H. Carlsaw, p. 170).

Dear ones, we usually fear that which we believe is out of our control (whether it is a person or a situation). But heavenly wisdom stands upon this truth: “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6).

(2) Wisdom will defend you from the way and temptations of the evil man, who departs from the paths of truth and righteousness (Proverbs 2:12-13). Wisdom will shade you from the abuses and extremes that the world would drive you to in following your pleasures wherever they might lead you. Wisdom applies the truth of moderation in food, drink, exercise, pleasure, clothing, and work. Wisdom’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Wisdom delights in the glory of God before the glory of man, in a pure conscience before God over a defiled conscience in pleasing yourself, in a life of faithfulness in doctrine and practice over a life of simply fitting in with the crowd.

(3) Wisdom will defend you from destruction (Proverbs 10:14; Proverbs 15:24). You see, dear ones, if one is looking to this world as his life, he is a fool and will find destruction and

misery. If one is looking to heaven above as his life, he is wise and will find satisfaction and joy. Do you think, dream, speak, and act as if the way of life is above or below? Compare Lot's wife who looked back longing for the pleasures and comforts of Sodom, and to that of Paul who said he was not looking back but looking forward and upward to Christ (in Philippians 3:13-14). We could go on and on speaking of the value of wisdom, but I would encourage you to read for yourself the value of wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

II. The Practice of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:13-14).

A. Here is where the rubber meets the road. Heavenly wisdom teaches us to seriously meditate upon the work of God's providence in this world ("Consider the work of God: who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" Ecclesiastes 7:13).

1. It is the foolish person who does not stop to consider the work and activity of God in ordaining and governing all the affairs of man. It is the wise person who considers and looks carefully at the amazing work of God in the world, and particularly in his/her own life. Dear ones, you can become so busy that you do not stop to consider the work of God. You can become so rebellious that you do not want to consider the work of God, because you despise and hate what is happening in your life. In either case, Solomon gives you one characteristic of the wise person who would know peace, contentment, and joy in this life: he/she considers the work of God.

2. Here is the practical use of wisdom in the lives of those who are wise. Those who are wise do not attribute what happens in the world to an impersonal fate (*que sera sera*—whatever will be will be). Those who are wise do not attribute what happens in the world ultimately to the mere decisions of man (as if man absolutely controls his own life and destiny). Those who are wise attribute what happens in the world ultimately to the mighty hand of God, who works all things after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). You can either be rebellious and miserable in continually banging your head against the wall of God's most wise and holy providence, or you can be submissive and happy in learning in the school of Christ the lessons of trusting Christ when you are afraid, patiently waiting upon Christ in the midst of life's detours and delays, thanking Christ for every blessing when He removes blessings from you, and being humbled when problems seem to be headed toward you like a speeding train. Dear ones, herein is foolishness (on the one hand) and wisdom (on the other hand) revealed: Are you frustrated, angry, or impatient under the mighty hand of God? That is foolish. Or are you submitting, resting, and patient under the mighty hand of God? That is wise. This is the test for all of us as to whether we are acting foolishly or wisely. You cannot say that you are frustrated, upset, and all stressed out about a situation or about a person, and not say at the same time that you are ultimately frustrated, upset, and all stressed out with the Lord. For He has put you into the situation in which you find yourself presently. And He has done so (with you who trust Christ alone for your eternal salvation) in order that you might learn to rest and relax in His love for you in transforming you into the image of Christ. How we act like foolish children in kicking, screaming, and throwing temper tantrums under the mighty hand of God. But just as a good parent is not going to give in to that kind of behavior, so the Lord as a perfect Father is not going to do so either.

3. Solomon asks, "For who can make that straight which he hath made crooked? (Ecclesiastes 7:13). In other words, do we puny little people really think we can work against the most wise, holy, and powerful providence of God, so as to remove everything from it that we don't like? If God has made your path crooked before you in taking you down a road that is uncomfortable, painful, and difficult, are you stronger than God, and can you with the snap of a finger alter and change those circumstances or people around you? In your heart of hearts, you know you cannot do this, and that is why you fuss and complain against the situation you are in—because you know God's in charge and you don't like it. This is your rebellion and foolishness which leads to destruction. Whereas the heart of the wise trusts the love of God for His people, and knows that even the greatest trials of life are for your good, for your correction, for your

instruction, and for your growth in Christ. Dear Christian, when you pray that God will grow you in faith, realize that one of the means He uses is the crooked road in your life. Wisdom learns contentment under God's mighty hand. Foolishness kicks and screams under God's mighty hand.

B. Finally, heavenly wisdom teaches you to live a life wherein you do not forget your God in prosperity or in adversity: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him" (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

1. Beloved, the Lord does not want the child of God to be miserable in this life, just to be miserable. You may think He does, because He places you in so many difficult situations and in the presence of so many difficult people. Dear ones, those situations and people have not been placed there by God in order to make you miserable, just to be miserable, but rather God's revealed will in those situations is that you learn to be content, patient, and joyful. To the contrary, you have chosen to be miserable in that situation, rather than to be joyful. Paul has given us the revealed will of God in all trials of life, "Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

2. When the Lord brings times of prosperity into your life, He wants you to remember Him in your celebrations. No one should find more joy in the blessings of God than one who trusts Christ, loves Christ, and obeys Christ (God gives us richly all things to enjoy according to 1 Timothy 6:17). There is a place in the life of a Christian to kill the fatted calf and to have a time of celebration for God's goodness. Beloved, if you do not enjoy the blessings that God brings to you in His most wise, holy, and powerful providence, you do not enjoy Him who gave them. However, your joy must always be chiefly directed to God, who so graciously has bestowed blessings upon you who deserve only His wrath.

3. When the Lord brings times of adversity into your life, He does not want you to be miserable (for the purpose of being miserable), but to consider Him and to see His mighty hand in these affairs as well. Just as times of prosperity are from Him, so are times of adversity. Those who are wise receive both prosperity and adversity in submission from the hand of God (Job 2:9-10). The Lord, dear ones, intertwines both prosperity and adversity into your life, so that one follows the other—so that in prosperity and in adversity you may not forget Him, but learn to trust Him and to hope in Him at all times. When you are in prosperity, remember that adversity may be just around the corner, so that you do not become intoxicated with pleasure, thinking the good times will never end. When you are in adversity, remember that prosperity may be around the corner, so that you do not fall into despair. God keeps you from seeing what lies ahead, so that you might not look ultimately to prosperity or to adversity, but to Him who ordains all things for His glory and your good.

4. Dear ones, the fruit of wisdom is resting in the good providence of God, who makes no mistakes and who can do you no wrong. The fruit of foolishness is kicking and screaming under the good providence of God, proudly imagining you could do a better job in ordering your life in this world than He. Wisdom is the way of joy. Foolishness is the way of misery. Christ is the way of joy. The world is the way of misery.

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