

## “Wise Words for Wise Ones” (Ecclesiastes 7:15-8:1)

A young man loaned an acquaintance \$500, but failed to get the borrower’s signature on a receipt. When the guy hadn’t paid him back a year later, he realized he had probably lost the money due to lack of proof. He asked his father what to do. “The answer is simple,” his father said. “Just write him and say you need the \$1,000 you loaned him.” “You mean \$500,” his son replied. “No, you need to say \$1,000. He’ll immediately write back that he only owes you \$500, and then you’ll have it in writing!”<sup>1</sup>

This father provided wise counsel and his son was able to receive profitable words in writing. Similarly, our heavenly Father provides wise counsel and we can read His profitable words in the writings of the Bible. And who can’t benefit from a bit more wisdom? In Eccl 7:15-29 Solomon says, “*Wise up by going low.*” By this he means biblical wisdom comes through humility. In this passage, Solomon offers three provisions of wisdom.

**1. Wisdom provides humility (7:15-18).** In these first four verses, Solomon discusses one of the most prevalent questions of human history: Why do good people suffer and bad people prosper? In 7:15 he writes, “**I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility;<sup>2</sup> there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.**”<sup>3</sup> The phrase “I have seen everything” is akin to the contemporary expression of disgust, “Now, I’ve seen it all.” Solomon is a bit miffed that there doesn’t seem to be any correlation between one’s goodness and one’s lifespan.<sup>4</sup> We see this principle alive and well today. We see righteous people die abruptly, and we see wicked fools living for what seems too long. Think about it...Jesus lived to be 33 and Hugh Hefner seems as if he’s going to outlive all of us. That doesn’t make a whole lot of sense, does it?

It’s easy to agonize over these hazy areas of the faith, like those spots on a sparkling car window that simply won’t come clean. Yet, these hazy areas tell me that God is real, dynamic, and too great for my conception. His ways are higher than mine.<sup>5</sup> If there were no hazy areas, Christianity would be too neat, too trite. If I can fully understand God’s thoughts, He would be no more God than I am. Others approach this theological puzzle (and others) with an ultimatum: solve it or God is not real. This is like approaching a 10,000 piece jigsaw puzzle and saying, “If I can’t assemble this in five minutes, I will deny that it’s a picture.” That’s unfair, isn’t it? It’s also irrational. Our inability to work out an answer reflects only on our limitations, not God’s.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it makes sense to trust our loving and powerful God even when He does not think and act like we might want Him to. After all, He sees the end from the beginning. With this in mind, today will you give the Lord whatever intellectual issues that you are struggling with? It’s as simple as saying, “God, I don’t understand what you are doing or why you are doing it, but you are God and I am not so I will trust You.”<sup>7</sup> *Wise up by going low.*

Since we can’t possibly understand God’s decisions, Solomon’s conclusion in 7:16-17 is, “**Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise.<sup>8</sup> Why should you ruin yourself? Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool.<sup>9</sup> Why should you die before your time?**” These verses have been terribly misunderstood. Some have dubbed these verses “the golden mean,” which suggests we should not be too righteous or too wicked. Rather, we should strike a balance and achieve a happy medium. Yet, if Solomon is telling us to be moderately godly, he is contradicting the Bible which clearly teaches us to seek righteousness and holiness with all that is within us.<sup>10</sup> I believe, therefore, Solomon’s concern is not with godly character, but with godly character *in one’s own eyes*. His point is that we should not depend on our righteousness or wisdom to guarantee God’s blessing in our lives.<sup>11</sup> In other words, if you are a particularly righteous person don’t be too confident that you will live to see your 120<sup>th</sup> birthday. The verb translated “ruin yourself” is better rendered to “be appalled, astounded.”<sup>12</sup> Solomon is saying, “Don’t assume that God owes you anything for your righteousness.” If you do, you might be confounded or disappointed like the righteous person who dies at a young age.<sup>13</sup>

The truth is, no matter how righteous or wise we attempt to be we are still sinners in need of God's mercy and grace. The apostle Paul understood this. Early in his ministry, he called himself the least of the apostles. Later on he said he was the least of all Christians. Then he said he was the chief of sinners. The older he got, the more he saw of God, the lower he became in his own estimation.<sup>14</sup> In the same vein, John Newton, the former slave trader and author of "Amazing Grace," said, "When I get to heaven, I will be amazed at three things. I will be amazed at those I thought would be there who are not there, those I did not think would be there who are there, and the fact that I am there at all."<sup>15</sup>

The Chinese are reported to have a saying, "The shoot that grows tall is the first to be cut."<sup>16</sup> Biblically and practically, it makes sense to be humble. There is just too much we don't understand. There are too many questions, too many tragedies, and too much sin. The only solution is to *wise up by going low*. But what does this look like practically? It means you take a close look at how you think, speak, and act. When you think of Christian self-righteousness, you most likely think of a person who sees the faults of others, but is oblivious to his or her own condition. Tragically, this may be the most frequently used reason for not becoming a Christian. In the past, I used to dismiss this by saying, "There are hypocrites in every profession and sphere of life." But now I agree with statements relating to hypocrisy among Christians. I will even acknowledge that I have been guilty of hypocrisy as well. I empathize with people who quote the common bumper sticker, "Jesus, save me from your followers." Don't get me wrong, we need to be authentically righteous, but we also need to be especially humble.

Not only is Solomon opposed to self-righteousness, he is also opposed to wickedness. Although we are sinful and will always have remains of hypocrisy and self-righteousness, we need to be careful not to use our sinfulness as an excuse to sin even more. The fact that we aren't perfect should spur us on toward holiness, not toward moral compromise. It's easy to see how this line of reasoning might work. "I've already told one lie. What difference will another make?" Or "I know I shouldn't have used foul language, but why stop now?" All such reasoning is evil. Why compound your troubles by continuing to sin? When you're in a hole, stop digging. If you can't make things better, at least make sure you don't make them worse. This applies to all of us because everyone struggles with sin to one degree or another. You don't have to take another drink, you don't have to cheat a second time, you don't have to keep on swearing, and you don't have to lose your temper over and over again. By the power of God, and with the help of a few good friends, you can stop the patterns of sin and replace them with habits of holiness.<sup>17</sup>

If we choose to disregard God's Word and play the fool we may die before our time. The truth is, God does sometimes punish the wicked in this life. There have been times over the course of my life when I have wondered what would happen if I attempted to steer off a cliff while driving my car. I have thought to myself, "Would God send an angel to steer my car away from imminent danger? Would God Himself slam on the brakes before I drove off the cliff? Would He keep my steering wheel from turning in the direction of the cliff?" The answer to these questions is, "NO, NO, NO!" This is not to say that the Lord would not work a miracle, but the odds are against it. If I make a foolish decision, I may pay for it with my life. Young people, please don't play the fool. One experiment with drugs could end your life. One sexual encounter could cost you dearly. One suicidal attempt could be your last. It's not worth it. Live in light of eternity. Exercise wisdom and self-control. *Wise up by going low*.

The final verse of this section is rather interesting. Solomon writes in 7:18, "**It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.**" The "one thing" that you are to grasp is the teaching of 7:17. The "other thing" that you are not to let go of is the wisdom of 7:16. In other words, it is good in life to grasp 7:17—don't be wicked and foolish and blow life; be holy and wise. But at the same time, remember 7:16—you are a finite sinner who can't control God or even understand what He's up to. Obey God and what you know. Trust Him in what you don't.<sup>18</sup> *Wise up by going low*.

[Wisdom provides humility. We will now see...]

**2. Wisdom provides strength (7:19-22).** In this section, Solomon says, “Wisdom is a strong ally in this fallen world, but it cannot shield believers from pain, injustice, and bad circumstances.” In 7:19 Solomon writes, **“Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.”** The Hebrew word for “wisdom” (*hokmah*) refers to “the skill of living.” This involves both a godly perspective and a godly power to live life. Perspective and power are like the two wings on a bird, the two blades of a pair of scissors, or the two sides of a coin. The whole of wisdom doesn’t exist without both perspective and power.<sup>19</sup> In 7:19, Solomon states that the wisdom of God is better than surrounding yourself with the ten best men you can find. It’s been said that a man with a Bible could stay in a cave for a year, and at the end of that time, he could know from his reading what everybody else in the world was doing. There is no greater blessing than wisdom. There is no greater activity than walking with God and revering Him. But watch out that you don’t let your good behavior go to your head.<sup>20</sup>

The reason for such humility is found in 7:20 where Solomon writes, **“Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.”**<sup>21</sup> In our fallen state, our entire wills are oriented against God. We are bent on our own ways of evil from the get-go. Augustine said the only reason you think a baby is good is that he hasn’t got the power enough to show you how evil he is. He said, “If a baby had the strength when he emerged from the mother’s womb, he would seize the mother by the throat and demand his milk.” The only way any of us can be saved is if God makes radical change in us from the inside out. So Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Then the Spirit of God changes our nature by abiding with us, keeping us, sanctifying us, and raising us by His power.<sup>22</sup>

In 7:21-22 we come to some especially relevant and practical words. Solomon is going to tell us that sometimes it pays to be a little hard of hearing. He writes, **“Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you. For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.”** Here Solomon says, “Don’t eavesdrop; don’t listen in on every conversation. Don’t go out of your way to listen to what is being said about you—sooner or later you’ll be disappointed. You’ll hear someone cursing you.” Of course, this is particularly distressing when you hear people in the church that you know and love cursing you. In my own pastoral ministry, I have been grieved and shocked by those who have intentionally or unintentionally sought to damage me. Maybe you’ve had a similar experience with other Christians. It hurts, doesn’t it? The truth is it doesn’t matter where you are, who you are, or what you do, people will fail you. Your best friends will fail you. Your coworkers will fail you. Your pastors will fail you. Your brothers and sisters will fail you. Your parents will fail you. Your spouse will fail you. Your children will fail you. If you live long enough, every one you count on in this life will fail you sooner or later.

How can you cope with the hurtful words that others have said about you? Solomon’s advice to the wise is not to listen to the gossip people say about you, because you know in your heart you have said unkind things about others as well. Let’s be honest. If we get upset when people talk about us, we are holding them to a higher standard than we hold ourselves to, because we are prone to do the same thing. With that said, sometimes a rebuke is in order if the comments are especially divisive. We need to be prepared to lovingly drill a fellow believer between the eyes and say, “Don’t talk about my brother or sister like that.” The reason that gossip and slander continue to go in most churches is that Christians tolerate it. No one ever wants to stick their neck out and call sin “SIN.”

My prayer is that you and I will stand up for others and sit down for ourselves. I am learning to take the destructive words of others toward me with a grain of salt.<sup>23</sup> One man said, “I never worry about people who say evil things about me because I know a lot more stuff about me than they do, and it’s worse than what they are saying.”<sup>24</sup> Seriously, the key to defusing gossip and slander is to humble yourself and not take yourself too seriously.<sup>25</sup> *Wise up by going low.*

[Wisdom provides humility and strength. Now we will see that...]

**3. Wisdom provides insight (7:23-8:1).** In this final section, Solomon warns of the danger of foolishness. Yet, the implication is that wisdom can win the day through humility. In 7:23-24 Solomon writes, **“I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me. What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?”** In these two verses, Solomon discovered that he could not discover. Although he sought after wisdom with all diligence, he acknowledged that true wisdom was far beyond him. He continued in 7:25 by writing, **“I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.”** Literally this is, “I myself turned my heart.”<sup>26</sup> The ancients thought “the heart” was the center of thinking, reasoning, and feeling. Maybe we would say “he got his mind around an issue.” The search was sincere, thorough, and intensive. God has put in our hearts the desire “to know,” but it is beyond our current fallen ability. The desire probably comes from our being made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27), but sin has damaged our ability (cf. Gen 3). Yet, we still seek, search, yearn, and strive! This is to be commended, but it must be acknowledged that we are incredibly limited. We desperately need the Lord to reveal His thoughts and ways to us. Today, will you ask the Lord for His mind and heart? Will you ask for His insight? *Wise up by going low.*

So did Solomon discover anything? In 7:26 he writes, **“And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.”** There is some mystery surrounding the identity of this woman. Some understand this woman to be a prostitute or an adulterer.<sup>27</sup> The application then is to avoid sexual sin. I believe, however, that this woman is the personification of that wickedness which is folly itself. She is the “strange woman” of Proverbs 1-9.<sup>28</sup> The antecedent of “the woman” is folly (7:25), a Hebrew feminine noun that also has an article. This conclusion seems corroborated by the allusions in 7:26 to the tactics of folly who tries to lure one away from wisdom’s embrace.<sup>29</sup> The point is: Foolishness is like a seductive woman, so beware for she will lead you to your demise. Be like a wise person who refuses to be captured by her. Use discretion as you travel this life. Choose your friends wisely. Bad company corrupts good morals.<sup>30</sup> Guard your intake of television and movies. Don’t watch programming that will tear you down in your walk with Christ.

The mysterious words continue in 7:27-29 where Solomon writes, **“Behold, I have discovered this, says the Preacher, ‘adding one thing to another to find an explanation, which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these. Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.’”** These verses lead us to ask whether Solomon was a chauvinist or a misogynist. Yet, when we read Proverbs and the Song of Solomon, we know that this is not the case.<sup>31</sup> In fact, in Proverbs, Solomon often personifies wisdom as a woman. So let’s get one thing out of the way immediately: Solomon isn’t making a relative comparison as to the worth of men and women in general. That wouldn’t be fair and his conclusion wouldn’t be right. Furthermore, remember that with 1,000 women Solomon was the consummate ladies man.<sup>32</sup> He’s not going to jeopardize his relationship with women, right?

The “man” in view in 7:28 is the “one who is pleasing to God” in 7:26. The Hebrew word for “man” here (*adam*) is generic and refers to people rather than males in contrast to females. Solomon meant in 7:28b that a person who is pleasing to God is extremely rare (cf. Job 9:3; 33:23). The reference to “woman” (7:28c) is a way of expressing in parallelism (with “man”) that no one really pleases God completely. A paraphrase of 7:28b-c is, “I have found very few people who please God, no one at all really.”<sup>33</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by 7:29 where Solomon demonstrates the scarcity—even nonexistence—of good people, whether man or woman. That the parallelism of man and woman in 7:28 describes all humankind is corroborated by 7:29—a probable reference to the creation and fall of “mankind.”<sup>34</sup>

Verse 29 asserts two truths from Genesis: Initially, all of God's creation was good.<sup>35</sup> Humans can understand and implement God's will. Fallen humans are creative and energetic in the area of evil and rebellion.<sup>36</sup> Though morally capable, humans turn from God's will to self-will at every opportunity! Even though we seek righteousness, we need to remember that no matter how good we get, we are still sinful—every last one of us—men and women both. We need to remember that no matter how good we get, the only reason people tolerate us is that we have learned how to tame our public evil as opposed to our private evil. Does that disturb you about yourself? Here it is again: The only reason that you're a likable person is that you have learned to distinguish between your public and private obnoxiousness, and you are smart enough to keep your lustful, hateful, wicked thoughts contained in your brain. In your public treatment of people, you have remained basically hygienic and nonviolent.<sup>37</sup> I know this is a hard word, but don't get mad at me; I'm just the mailman. I just deliver the mail.

So who is responsible for the universal failure to please God? Solomon said people are, not God. God made us upright in the sense of being able to choose to please or not please God. Nevertheless, in 7:29 we have all gone our own way in pursuit of "many devices."<sup>38</sup> The point is not that people have turned aside to sin, but that they have sought out many explanations.<sup>39</sup> They have sought many explanations of what? In the context Solomon was talking about God's plan. Failing to understand fully God's scheme of things, people have turned aside to their own explanations of these things.

Solomon closes out this section in 8:1 with a transitional verse: **"Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam."** Wisdom provides insight. Wisdom will bring illumination and a smile to your face. How can you get wisdom? The primary way is by reading and heeding God's Word. This morning, I was reading Proverbs 6. (I like to read one proverb for every day of the month.) This is what I read in 6:16-19: "There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers." The first item that God hates is "haughty eyes." God hates pride and self-righteousness. The fourth item is "a heart that devises wicked plans." This summarizes the whole of foolishness and wickedness. The last item on this list is God hates it when "one spreads strife among brothers." This ties back into Eccl 7:21-22. If you and I want to be wise ones, we will study God's Word and then apply it to our lives. As Solomon said in Prov 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." May we heed these words and *wise up by going low*.

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### **Scripture References**

Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

Isaiah 40:13-14

1 Kings 21:1-14

Jeremiah 12:1-5

1 Corinthians 3:18-20

2 Samuel 20:14-22

Matthew 18:21-35

### **Study Questions**

1. What “good” people do I know personally who died too young (7:15)? What “evil” people lived much too long? Why would God permit such a travesty of moral justice? How will I respond to the question, “Why do only the good die young?”
2. Why is it easier for me to have a higher opinion of myself than I should (7:16-18)? How do I struggle with pride and self-righteousness? What are some of the motivations that lie behind this? How can I cultivate a humble heart before God and others? Read Luke 18:9-14.
3. In what area(s) of my life do I need wisdom as a source of strength (7:19)? How can I learn to rely upon the Lord for His strength instead of my own? Why is there such a temptation to be independent? How can I break this habit? Read John 15:1-5.
4. When have I been infuriated by someone’s sin against me (7:21-22)? Does it help to remember that I have also sinned against others? Why or why not? Am I angry at someone because they failed me? In what ways have I failed others? How can I learn to control my tongue? How have I owned my sin? Have I confessed my gossip, slander, and bitterness to God and others? Read Matthew 12:36.
5. How many truly wise people do I know? What character qualities do they share? What keeps me from being labeled a “wise” man or woman? How can I grow so that I become biblically wise?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Kent Crockett's Sermon Illustrations, [www.kentrockett.com](http://www.kentrockett.com).

<sup>2</sup> The term "futility" (*hebel*) means "vapor" or "breath," but in Ecclesiastes it is used metaphorically to describe the transitoriness and meaninglessness of human, earthly life.

<sup>3</sup> Eaton writes, "The introduction of a vertical perspective does not nullify the overall problem: life remains subject to vanity. The Preacher aims neither to abolish nor even to explain life's anomalies, but to enable one to live with them. It is a simple fact that the *righteous* may, like Naboth (1 Ki. 21:13), *perish in his righteousness*, whereas the wickedness of a Jezebel (1 Ki. 18-19) may persist. The anomaly frequently perplexed the devout Israelite (cf. Jb.; Pss. 37; 73; Hab. 1:13-17). The blunt statement with no explanation (except perhaps 7:29) demands simply that the believer face life in this world as it really is. Forewarned is forearmed (cf. 1 Pet 4:12)." Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Old Testament; Leicester, Eng., and Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 113.

<sup>4</sup> While it is certainly true that "the fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened" (Prov 10:27), Solomon has seen some galling exceptions. Therefore, he urges us not to claim that we are better than we are.

<sup>5</sup> Isa 55:8-9 states, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.'"

<sup>6</sup> David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 200.

<sup>7</sup> It would also be worth reading Kenneth Boa, *God, I Don't Understand: Answers to Difficult Questions of the Faith* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 86.

<sup>9</sup> Instead of saying, "Do not be overly foolish," Solomon merely declares: "do not be a fool." By doing so, he seems to be suggesting that a person is either a fool or he/she is not a fool (i.e., there are no degrees of being a fool). Furthermore, trying too hard to become something—whether "good" or "bad"—does not accomplish lasting success. "Trying too hard" merely breeds frustration and an emptiness because the effort takes place "under the sun" and, for the most part, the success of such an effort is short-lived, perhaps "benefiting" the person only in his/her life "under the sun" and not in his/her eternal life. Barry C. Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class notes.

<sup>10</sup> See 2 Cor 7:1; Phil 3:13-14; Heb 12:14.

<sup>11</sup> The real clue to this passage is to be found in the second verb of Eccl 7:16, *to be wise*. This form must be rendered reflexively according to the Hebrew verb form: to think oneself to be furnished with wisdom. As such, it makes the same point as the famous text in Prov 3:7 does, "Be not wise in your own eyes." Thus it was not the case of having too much righteousness or wisdom; rather, it was the problem of self-delusion and the problem of having a superego that needed to have large doses of humility added. When people become too holy, too righteous and too wise in their own eyes, then they become too holy and too wise for everyone—not in reality, of course, but in their own estimation! Since Eccl 7:17 follows the pattern of 7:16, and since the two verses are part of the same thought, the resulting translation would be: Do not multiply [your] righteousness and do not play the part of the wise [in your own eyes]—why destroy yourself? Do not multiply [your] wickedness and do not be a [downright] fool—why die before your time?" Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 295.

<sup>12</sup> The verb *tissomem* is translated elsewhere in this stem as "to be astonished" (e.g., Ps 143:4; Isa 59:16; 63:5; Dan 8:27), meaning an OT person who had heard the Deuteronomic promises of health, blessing, and prosperity for the obedient covenant partners may be surprised when the unfairness and fallenness of this age takes the life of "righteous" covenant partners early. Also that an obviously wicked person lives a prosperous, long life (cf. Ps 73). See also the NET translation and study notes.

<sup>13</sup> Donald R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Scripture Press/Victor, 1985), 994.

<sup>14</sup> Tommy Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 115.

<sup>15</sup> Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God*, 114-115.

<sup>16</sup> Robert S. Ricker with Ron Pitkin, *Soul Search: Hope for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living from Ecclesiastes* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ray Pritchard, *Something New Under the Sun: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Living* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 189.

<sup>18</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, Vol. 18, Bible and Literature Series, ed. by David M. Gunn (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 236.

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<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> This is an affirmation of the fallenness of all humanity (cf. 1 Kgs 8:46; 2 Chron 6:36; Job 15:14-16; 25:4; Ps 130:3-4; 143:2; Prov 20:9; Rom 3:9-18, 23; 1 John 1:8-2:1). Rom 3:10-12 states, “There is no one righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, not even one” (NET). See also Ps 14:3; 53:3; Isa 53:6; 64:6; Jer 17:9; Mark 7:21-23.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God*, 118-119.

<sup>23</sup> Ricker and Pitkin, *Soul Search*, 101.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 206.

<sup>25</sup> Remember Jesus’ words, “Woe unto you when all men speak well of you” (Luke 6:26). Elsewhere He said, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (Matt 5:11).

<sup>26</sup> The verb “directed” (*sabab*) is used in Eccl 2:20.

<sup>27</sup> Garrett holds that this verse is speaking of the relationship between a husband and wife in Gen 3:16. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 324-25.

<sup>28</sup> See esp. Prov 2:16. This verse seems to be out of context, therefore, some have said “the woman” refers to (1) “godless philosophy” (i.e., wisdom personified, cf. Eccl 7:4; 9:10); (2) the “foolishness” (i.e., the word is *Femine*) of 7:25; or (3) the sin of Eve (cf. Genesis 3). Proverbs personifies both evil and wisdom in a woman. Option 2 seems to be the best option since wisdom is the dominant theme from Eccl 7:20 to 8:1.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Prov 5:3-5; 7:10-27; cf. 2:16-19. David A. Hubbard, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon: Communicator’s Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 175-176; Choon Leon Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 271-272.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Cor 15:33.

<sup>31</sup> See Prov 12:4; 14:1; 18:22; and 19:14

<sup>32</sup> Pritchard, *Something New Under the Sun*, 200.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Ecclesiastes”; 2007 edition: <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/ecclesiastes.pdf>, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Greg W. Parsons, “Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Ecclesiastes,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003): 293.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Gen 1:31. The Lord calls His creation “good” (*tob*) a total of seven times (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Gen 3-4; 6:5, 11-13; 11:1-9.

<sup>37</sup> Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God*, 120.

<sup>38</sup> The same Hebrew word translated “devices” (*chishshabon*) in Eccl 7:29 reads “explanation” in 7:25 and 27.

<sup>39</sup> See Isaiah’s words, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isa 53:6).