

Wisdom Is Profitable

"Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it. Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him." (Ecclesiastes 7:11-14)

Solomon is comparing two powers that offer their possessors the ability to defend themselves against many of the circumstances of life. On the one hand is money and on the other, wisdom. Money can help one avoid and even preserve a person from many of life's difficulties. Wisdom, however, can give him something no amount of money can — life. Wisdom produces things material possessions cannot because it is insurance against willful self-destruction, whether physical or spiritual.

Wisdom counsels us to understand that some situations cannot be rectified. No amount of money or wisdom will prevent them from occurring. We can do nothing about them because the circumstances are beyond our powers, and we should not overly fret about them.

Good and bad times occur in everybody's life. There will be situations that are seemingly unjust, such as the righteous seeming not to be prospered, becoming diseased and dying young, while the evil are prospered with wealth, good health, and long, comfortable lives. These things occur in every culture on earth. We are to consider — to see — that God overrules all and is well aware of what is happening.

The passage concludes by drawing our attention to the future. It is beyond our abilities to know precisely what is going to happen. How long will our present trial last? Will we be drawn into another? Solomon is not saying we should not think about the future, but that we will never know precisely what is coming. Thus, we should not be overly concerned about it. We must live with the belief that God is on His throne, which allows us to be emotionally stable.

Solomon does not begin to give an answer to the thought he is posing until verses 18-19, and even then, it is a very brief answer: "It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all. Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city."

The combination of the fear of God and wisdom, which is the fruit of vision, appears together as a solution. Because the circumstances he posed will affect all, Solomon's advice is to keep on following wisdom. This is a precursor to the climax of the book where he says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil" (12:13-14).