"A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold" (Prov. 22:1). Why? In what way is a good reputation superior to economic success? Let's give it some thought.

First, a good name is of a higher order of good than wealth. It is possible to have great riches without the honor of a good name, but it is not possible to be filled the spiritual wealth of joy and peace in the absence of a good name, regardless of how fiscally well off one may be. A good name is vital to one's spiritual well-being; wealth is only incidental to his well-being.

Second, a good name is closer to one than are his physical possessions. A man's character and its attendant reputation are worn nearer to his personal being than the tightest fitting garment in his wardrobe. He can be clothed in the finest fabrics and still be naked if he is not wrapped in a good name.

Third, a good name is a more accurate assessment of one's true status. Silver and gold can only confer fame or infamy, but a good name can bring honor. In fact, a good name is more desirable than a great name. It is not important how many people know a man, what counts is that he is known for his purity of heart and integrity of character.

Fourth, a good name is an indicator of quality. While it is possible for a good name to be given to a wicked man for a short time, this condition will not endure. We are admonished to avoid endorsing anyone in haste (1Tim. 5:22); yet, in spite of this, an evil person is occasionally honored beyond his merits. At the same time, a good man can temporarily lose his good reputation due to the malicious gossip of the jealous. Shakespeare wrote:

Good name in man and woman, dear,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash;
'Tis a thing, 'tis nothing.
But he that filches from me my good name
Rob me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed. 
(Othello, act 3, scene 3, line 155)

Likewise, this state will not last. Eventually the honor of the righteous will be restored, and the plots of wicked will be uncovered. The reason is simple: reputation is the product of character. Assigning a good reputation to a scoundrel will soon be found to be a mistake. The improperly given regard will be seen as an ill-fitting garment as others begin to notice that the name does not match the character. Conversely, the man of virtue will not be without a good name for very long. Even if his good name is stolen by evil-doers, his reputation will eventually return. A good name only sticks to quality character.

Fifth, a good name is a source of self-respect. Our culture has the proverbial cart before the horse in this matter. It is fashionable lore to suggest that if one is taught self-esteem, he will go on to accomplish good things. However, true wisdom teaches that
self-esteem is the product of accomplishing good things. He is entitled to be self-confident who has striven against obstacles and overcome. One who has worked to build a good name can take comfort and satisfaction from the fruit of his labors. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. 22:29).

Sixth, a good name is not burdened with the limitations of silver and gold. Wealth cannot bestow happiness; it cannot bring knowledge and wisdom; it cannot generate quality, lasting friendships; it does not motivate moral behavior; it is impotent in salvation. Instead, large amounts of silver and gold have the potential to reduce happiness, friendship, wisdom, and morality. In addition, great wealth carries the burdens of fear for its loss, responsibility for its misuse, temptations for the indulgence it affords, and anxiety over its disposition upon the death of its possessor. A man with an honorable name can properly bear these trials by virtue of a godly character, but a man without a good name will be destroyed by his possessions.

The Preacher wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:1: "A good name is better than precious ointment..." Again, the value of a good name is emphasized, but it is couched in terms that are a little obscure to late twentieth century America. The Germans have a proverb that closely parallels Solomon's inspired words: "Besser gut Gerucht als gute Geruche," that means, "better is good favor than good flavor."

Expensive, fragrant oils were sold for a premium price in Solomon's day. As was the custom in arid lands in Bible times, very little bathing took place, and body odor was a common fact of life. However, the wealthy could purchase scented oils to coat their bodies and cover up the smell. One who had his odor masked by a precious ointment was viewed as a member of the elite class of society.

Solomon turned conventional wisdom on its head by stating that a sweet-smelling reputation is of more value than a sweet-smelling body. One who applies himself to developing a good name and character has seen to his greater needs. In short, no amount of perfume can cover the stench of a bad reputation. After all, a sweet odor pleases the nose, but a sweet character pleases the whole being. A pleasant smell can infuse a whole room, yet a good name can enthuse a whole community. A precious ointment can last for hours, but an honorable name can survive for generations.

It is tragic for a man to work a lifetime to build a good name for himself and his children, only to have them squander it by means of worldliness, materialism, and immorality (Prov. 19:26). A child who thus shames his father may work for the rest of his life to restore what he wasted, but to no avail. Treasure the good name you have inherited. If you were bequeathed none, then choose to create one for yourself and your children. Pursue good character and maintain it for life.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). This name has been given to us by our Father in heaven (Rom. 8:16-18). We wear the Good Name of Jesus Christ (Isa. 62:2). We are called Christians (Eph. 2:19). Wear it with honor (Heb. 13:13).