

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK
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(Wisdom in Proverbs, No. 1)

SUBJECT: WISDOM IN PROVERBS
TITLE: THE SOURCE OF WISDOM
TEXT: PROVERBS 1:2, et. al.

INTRODUCTION. Proverbs is found in the section of the Bible we call Wisdom literature. Solomon's wisdom is proverbial - no pun intended. But centuries before Solomon, the patriarch Job was inspired to write about wisdom. In what may have been the earliest Scripture written, the patriarch Job asks, "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12). In verse 18 of the Wisdom Chapter, Job concludes that "the price of wisdom is above rubies." He follows logically, in 28:20, with the question, "From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding?" In the same chapter, Job reasons that:

God understands its way, And He knows its place (v.23), and "He looks to the ends of the earth" (v. 24), and "He saw wisdom and declared it; He prepared it, indeed, He searched it out. And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding'" (vv. 27-28).

While wisdom did not begin with Solomon, he placed a high premium on it, and obviously made it a primary object of his interest throughout his life. There is no denying that he did some really dumb things, but he is still considered the wisest of men. At a time when many people seem to see ignorance as a virtue, people criticize the preacher who "teaches" his people. However, many of those same people love to hear Stephen Olford preach, and when you hear Stephen Olford preach you cannot miss his passion for expository preaching. Olford stresses that there is a famine in America today, and it is a famine of expository preaching. While he did not say it, it would not take a great leap to conclude that there are a lot of Christians in America who are suffering from spiritual malnutrition.

Pray that before we finish this emphasis on the pursuit of wisdom, we will treasure it as did Job, pursue it as Solomon, and manifest it as Paul and John. We will limit our study to the Book of Proverbs, but you may want to take your studies beyond than. There has been a major emphasis on emotions in our day, with appeals for "heart religion," and "heart music." A total person, however, is made of intellect, emotions, and volition. We want to reach the whole person, and wisdom impacts the believer in all three areas. We know we ought to do it; we feel that we should do it; we decide that we will do it.

I. GOD BLESSED SOLOMON WITH EXTRAORDINARY WISDOM, I KINGS 3.

A. God Let Solomon Request Anything He Desired.

1. Solomon requested wisdom to rule God's people.
2. God granted him wisdom, wealth, and power.
3. His wisdom surpassed all men of his day.

“And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men...and his fame was in all the surrounding nations” (1 Kings 4:29-31).

B. Solomon's Wisdom Was Manifested in Many Practical Ways.

C. His Wisdom Is Reflected in the Proverbs He Wrote and Collected..

Early Christian writers called the book *Sophia* (Gk.), meaning “wisdom.” The term “proverb” comes from Hebrew root meaning “to be like.” The term was used of comparisons, rules of living, parables, sayings, or discourses on wisdom. In the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, the writers and editors used a device which is formed by antithesis: the wise and the foolish, the good and the wicked, the lazy and the industrious.

Solomon was not the only writer of these proverbs, but his proverbs comprise the lion's share of the wise sayings, and rules for living. One might spend a lifetime studying these proverbs and making an application of them in everyday life. What a study that would be! As a matter of fact, I would recommend one chapter from Proverbs a day for almost anyone. I cannot tell you how strongly I am convinced that a consistent application of the wisdom revealed in Proverbs would solve a lot of personal problems for people today. It would also put a lot of psychologists out of business. May we begin our study of proverbs with theme of the book - Practical Wisdom.

II. FIRST, LET US CONSIDER THE MEANING OF WISDOM.

A. Let Us Begin with What Is Not.

1. Wisdom is not the same as IQ.

I often visited with Chaplain Roscoe Hicks at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, usually before I went to one of the camps to preach to inmates. He had many stories about prisoners that I found especially interesting. One of the most moving stories concerned William Wetzel, a convicted murderer who was serving a life sentence. He became angry with another prisoner and murdered him. For that murder, Wetzel was sentenced to death. It was only after he received the death sentence that he wanted to see the chaplain. He was saved and immediately began studying the Word of God. Everyone who knew Wetzel was amazed at his grasp of the Scripture, even though the officials knew that he “had the highest IQ of anyone who had ever set foot on the grounds at

Parchman.”

The chaplain and many other people tried to get his sentence communicated to life without parole so that he could work with other prisoners. Because then Governor J. P. Coleman had been the judge in the case he left the decision to Lt. Governor Carroll Gartin, who simply did nothing. He let the petition die on his desk and William Wetzel in the gas chamber. The chaplain told me that was the first time he had ever seen the executioner with tears in his eyes. An official who witnessed the execution told me that he had witnessed a number of executions - but he would never witness another.

According to the witnesses, William Wetzel was a man with an exceptionally high IQ, but according to the Word of God, William Wetzel was a fool. After his conversion, again according to witnesses with whom I spoke, William Wetzel went into the gas chamber a wise man, or at least a man whose wisdom was growing daily. His high IQ did not produce wisdom. At the same time, his high IQ did not prohibit his quest for wisdom.

2. You can be smart and still lack wisdom.

Is there any doubt that some of the “smartest” people in any community, those who get the promotions, accumulate the wealth, and get elected to office, are often ignorant of the Word of God - in fact, they are ignorant of God. Christian wisdom is not surprised at this. Why should we be surprised that the world is, to use a computer term, “user friendly” to those who are of the world. There are “street wise” people in every community who lack the wisdom of a child in Vacation Bible School when it comes to the deeper things of life.

3. You can be well educated without having wisdom.

- a. The signers of the Humanist Manifesto (I & II) lacked wisdom.
- b. Charles Darwin now knows that he was a fool.
- c. Karl Marx just thought he was wise.
- d. Carl Sagan and Stephen J. Gould were brilliant evolutionists who lied to the world.
- e. The network people convinced millions that Bill Clinton was a brilliant man.

I was attending the Louisiana Baptist Pastors Conference in the chapel at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1992 when the someone came to the microphone to lead in prayer. Someone had just led in a hymn, and I sat down without realizing the prayer was next. Actually, I was anxious to get off a strained foot. As the man prayed for the pastors, a pastor behind me said, “Amen!” with considerable volume, inches from my ear. He prayed for the seminary.

“Amen!”

He prayed for the convention which would begin that evening.

“Amen!”

He prayed for the president of the convention.

“Amen!”

He then prayed, “Lord, we have just elected a Southern Baptist as president of the United States.”

“Gawd, help us!”

B. Now, Think With Me About What Wisdom Really Is.

1. Wisdom in Scripture has a moral connotation.

Some medical doctors have become addicted to drugs; a number of lawyers have broken laws and been sentenced to serve time in prison; corporate heads have been convicted of corruption; and politicians have been disgraced because of their sins. And, yes, some preachers have fallen. They all should have known better. Francis Shaeffer stressed that we should never be surprised at what fallen man will do. But, that does not mean that it is all futile. There is a way before every child of God that will lead to joy here and blessings forever.

Wisdom in the Bible has to do with making the right decisions. It has to do with discerning between right and wrong, between righteousness and unrighteousness. No one can be considered wise who lives a morally perverted, perverse, corrupt life.

2. Wisdom in the Bible is practical.

The emphasis on wisdom in Proverbs is not upon theoretical knowledge but upon a proper discernment between good and evil, between right and wrong. Because biblical wisdom involves knowledge, understanding, and discernment, it is applicable in everyday life. Christianity is not pie in the sky by and bye, as Marxists insist. It is nothing if not practical.

The Believer’s Study Bible Notes may help:

“Wisdom is the divinely created system of rules that governs the moral fiber of the universe. To master it is to achieve true and lasting success in life. **The first step toward wisdom, and its controlling principle, is faith in Yahweh.** There is a "counter-wisdom" called "folly," the practice of which leads just as surely to destruction. ‘Instruction’ (musar, Heb.) refers to training and discipline, implying that wisdom is for disciples who are willing to keep themselves under the restraint and control of Yahweh. "Understanding" or insight is from the root meaning ‘discern’ and points to the ability to make right choices (1 Kin. 3:9)” (Emphasis added).

III. TRUE WISDOM FINDS ITS SOURCE IN GOD, PROVERBS 1:1-7.

A. The Nature and Value of Wisdom Are Seen in Proverbs.

“To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding, To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion; A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, To understand a proverb and an enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles” (1:2-6).

1. Wisdom includes attention to instruction.
2. Wisdom includes knowledge and discretion.
3. Wisdom increases in understanding and learning.
4. Wisdom is not static.

B. The Source of Wisdom Is Revealed, 1:7.

1. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom.
2. The LORD gives wisdom, Pro. 2:6.
3. Solomon agrees with Job (Job. 28:20).

C. Conversely, to Deny God Is to Prove Yourself a Fool.

“The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God” (Ps. 53:1).

“A fool has no delight in understanding, But in expressing his own heart” (Pro. 18:2).

CONCLUSION. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That fear, however, is not the fear of the unknown, but a healthy, reverential fear of one’s Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. The wise person will trust Jesus Christ for Salvation, and crown Him as Lord over his life. The fool rejects God. There can be no greater sin, no greater rebellion against God, than for the creature to stand and look God in the face and declare, “I don’t want you;” or, “I don’t need you.” The fool may even say, I may want you later, but not now. If you reject God, you will have your wish granted irreversibly, and forever. There is no wisdom in that. The wisest thing you can do, if you have never received Jesus Christ, is to trust Him for His great salvation today. The wisest thing any believer can do is to seek to increase in wisdom, understanding, and discernment. When you do that, the Holy Spirit will become your Teacher, and the Bible your text. Let Jesus enroll you in His school of prayer,

wisdom, and applied Christianity today.

INVITATION.