

# THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

Johnny L. Sanders, D.Min.

(Proverbs, No. 4)

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SUBJECT: THE VALUE OF WISDOM

TITLE: WISDOM HIGHLY VALUED

TEXT: PROVERBS 8:11-17

INTRODUCTION. “A wise man seeks much counsel. A fool listens to all of it.” Larry Burkett said it. Think about it. A wise man seeks counsel, a Christian looks to the Holy Spirit for discernment. A wise person must have knowledge, but without discernment he is only a knowledgeable person, not necessarily a wise person. There is a difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom one can only receive from the Lord. How do we place a value on this kind of wisdom?

If you listen to a person long enough you will be able to tell what they value, what is important to them. Most people will reveal what it is on which they place greatest value. I have known young men who talked more about a sports car than anything else. I have read a articles about, and seen a few interviews with contestants in various beauty pageants. I have never been able to understand why a Christian would place so much emphasis on a “beauty contest”, especially when the Bible tells us that while man looks to the outward appearance, God looks at the heart. Man often emphasizes what God de-emphasizes and de-emphasizes what God emphasizes.

Admittedly, many pageants emphasize talent as well as communication. So, my point is not the fact that a young lady would enter a pageant, but that a particular pageant will become an obsession to which some will commit five or six years. These young ladies are not slothful participants in random pursuit of a title, but very committed young women who diet, exercise, and practice daily for months, some for years. They do not do that without placing a great deal of value on the crown.

A politician may spend millions of dollars in an effort to be elected to an office that will never pay enough to replace the money spent in the quest for the job. There is an old adage that once a person has all the money he knows what to do with, the only things left for some is power. There are people who place great value on political power. Of course, it would not be smart to confess that this is the motivation. His stated reason will more likely be patriotism or the desire to serve his country. Our political process is the best in the world, so I am not trying to discourage people from running for office. Some really are motivated by the desire to serve. Then there are those politicians like Al Gore whose behavior following the last election must have had old John Witherspoon spinning in his grave.

There are other people who make little effort to hide the fact that they place more value on money or wealth than almost anything else. Let me stress here, that I am not only not opposed to the

entrepreneurial spirit. I love it! I love capitalism, loathe Marxism, and cringe at socialism. But we are not talking here about lust for filthy lucre, but things we highly value.

I have a confession. I have always placed great value on wisdom - at least, I think I have. My mother was a greatest influence in my spiritual life, and my father supported her. My father was the greatest influence in motivating me to get an education, and Mother supported him in that. I have been around some people who really impressed me, and as I look back most of them did not live the lifestyle of the rich and famous. I am not talking about celebrities, even though I can name people in various fields whose accomplishments really amaze me. I loved Rocky Marciano, Stan Musial, Ted Williams, Bob Cousy, Arnold Palmer and Johnny Unitas. But most of my heroes are what I would call "heroes of the faith." I appreciate the martyrs, but I also appreciate those whose wisdom, education, and search for the truth have left so many of us with a debt of gratitude. Francis Shaeffer and C. S. Lewis are but two of many examples. I also remember many of my professors and various theologians I have read. I am thinking now of Dr. Ed Bloom, the general editor of the new Holman Christian Standard Bible, whose brilliance not only impressed me, but all the leadership at LifeWay Christian Resources when he met with us and fielded questions for the Broadman and Holman Committee, on which I serve. I will never forget Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, whom J. Edgar Hoover once said had the best working knowledge of Hebrew of any non-Jew in the United States.

I admire these and others for their education, their intellect, their brilliance. However, for me to say that I admire them for their wisdom would only expose my lack of wisdom. A person can be brilliant without possessing great wisdom. One may be a genius without being a truly wise person.

I placed value on education, and I pursued degrees at one college and two seminaries. In fact I have the honor of serving on the faculty of Cambridge Graduate School, whose president, Dr. Gene Jeffries, is not only a personal friend, but one of my heroes in the faith. I remember being asked to pray in chapel when I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I looked out and saw Dr. J. Hardy Kennedy, and in a nano-second, thought of all the things I had heard about his vocabulary and his command of the English language, and in the next nano-second had to dismiss the prayer that almost formed itself somewhere down in my ego - or was it the id? - "Lord, did You know Dr. Kennedy was going to be here today?"

Dr. Eddleman told me that he once asked Dr. Kennedy, the academic vice-president, what if he would recommend a promotion for a certain professor (or associate professor, as the case might have been). Dr. Kennedy responded in his humble, sincere, honest, dignified manner, "To recommend a promotion for Dr. so-and-so would be an endorsement of mediocrity." I place great value on the brilliance and the wisdom of a J. Hardy Kennedy.

I pursued financial stability - never expecting wealth on a pastor's salary - only to have the stock market throw me a curve. I am not concerned about fame today, and since I keep forgetting things these days, I don't remember whether or not that was ever very important to me. I have pursued wisdom - and I am still pursuing it. I have just enough wisdom after all these years to know how short I have fallen. I have learned, however, a little about the value of wisdom. For one thing, I have

learned to distinguish between the wisdom of this world - which is foolish to God - and the wisdom of God, which is as practical as it is ethical, as rare as it is valuable.

## I. WISDOM IS MORE VALUABLE THAN JEWELS, PROVERBS 8:11a.

### A. Jewels Represented Wealth.

1. Jewels are precious stones valued for their beauty and scarcity.
  - a. They were polished to enhance their beauty.
  - b. They were no natural deposits of precious stones in Israel.
  - c. They were taken as booty during war.
  - d. They were brought as gifts to kings.
  - e. Solomon had intimate knowledge of their value.
2. Jewels were used as a medium of exchange.
3. Conquering armies carried off jewels as spoils of war.

### B. In Ancient Israel Jewels Were Associated with Worship.

1. Jewels were used for special offerings (Exodus 35:22).
2. The ephod and breastplate worn by the high priest were decorated with jewels.

The Holman Bible Dictionary describes the use of jewels in the ephod and the breastplate:

The high priest was garbed in fine clothing decorated with jewels (Ex. 28; 39). The ephod worn by the high priest had an onyx stone, set in gold filigree and engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel, on each shoulder. The breastplate of the high priest (also called the "breastplate of judgment," Ex. 28:15,29) was made of the finest cloth, interwoven with gold, into which were set two precious stones, in four rows of three each. On each stone was engraved the name of one of the twelve tribes. Thus, the twelve tribes were symbolically present whenever the high priest ministered before the Lord.

### C. Jewels Were Considered a Fitting Gift for Kings.

1. The Queen of Sheba brought them to Solomon (1 Kings 10:2,10).
2. Jewels were used in royal crowns (2 Sam. 12:30).

3. They were probably used in making royal garments (Ezek. 28:13).
4. Jewels were a form of wealth which could be accumulated in the royal treasury.
5. The accumulation of such wealth could become a matter of great vanity (Eccl. 2:4-11).

D. While Precious Stones Were Rare, Jewelry Was Common in the Ancient World.

1. Jewelry was common in the Patriarchal period (Gen. 24:47).
2. Israelites received jewelry from the Egyptians as they began the Exodus (Ex.3:22; 11:2-3).
3. More jewelry came to Israel through trade with Egypt and other nations.

I drove to Memphis a number of years to see the Rameses Exhibit. No discerning person could tour the exhibit without a thorough understanding of one thing: you cannot study ancient Egypt without studying the importance of her religion on her culture. Historical revisionists have been busy trying to protect “our children” from the horror of learning that almost all of our Founding Fathers were men of deep and sincere faith in Jesus Christ. They lie when they tell us they were deists - they love to point to Jefferson and Franklin, but protect us from the testimonies of the great majority of them.

During the tour of the Ramseses Exhibit, I was particularly impressed with their medical skill. Evolutionists should take notice: man did not evolve from ignorant savages, they devolved into ignorant savages. Centuries before the Exodus, Egyptian physicians diagnosed brain tumors and surgically removed them - with a fairly respectable success rate, I might add.

During that tour I saw jewelry that had been designed and made by those ancient jewelers that would challenge any modern jeweler. There is little doubt the Solomon’s marriage to the daughter Pharaoh brought him great wealth in Egyptian jewelry.

E. Many Kinds of Jewels Are Mentioned in the Bible.

Royalty could afford to wear more precious stones set in gold and silver, but most people could afford simple jewelry. Both men and women wore bracelets. King Saul was wearing one when he died in battle (2 Sam. 1:10). Archaeologists have found ankle bracelets on the leg bones of women buried in ancient Israel. Necklaces and pendants were also popular (Song of Sol. 1:10), as were earrings and nose rings. I wonder about tongue rings!

F. The Most Important Item of Jewelry Was the Signet Ring.

Again, the Holman Bible Dictionary offers some insight:

The signet was used to make an impression on clay or wax and thus to seal and

authenticate documents. Generally the signet was a finely engraved semiprecious stone. A hole could be bored through the signet and it could be hung from a cord around the neck (Gen. 38:18), or it could be used as a setting for a ring or more elaborate necklace. Pharaoh gave Joseph his signet ring as a symbol of authority (Gen. 41:42). King Ahasuerus gave his signet ring first to Haman (Esther 3:10), then to Mordecai (Esther 8:2).

#### G. The Value of Jewels Is not to Be Left in Ancient Israel.

1. In the New Testament Jewels Are not Mentioned Very Often.
2. Pearls were used as a metaphor associated with the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:45-46).
3. We are warned not to discriminate on the basis of wealth manifested in the wearing of jewels (James 2:1ff).
4. Women are reminded that the best adornment is not jewels, but good deeds (1 Tim. 2:9f).
5. In Revelation 21, God Is Pictured as a Bridegroom Whose Bride, the New Jerusalem, Is Adorned with jewels.
  - a. The walls of the new Jerusalem are pictured as built of jasper, adorned with twelve kinds of jewels.
  - b. Each of the twelve gates is made of a single pearl.
  - c. The gems of the holy city are set in gold.

#### II. ALL DESIRABLE THINGS CANNOT COMPARE WITH HER, 8:11b.

##### A. Wisdom Is Personified in 8:12-13.

*"I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate."*

1. Wisdom dwells with prudence.
  - a. Prudence denotes forethought.
  - b. It also suggests caution.
2. Wisdom seeks, and finds, knowledge.
  - a. Knowledge does not guarantee wisdom.
  - b. Biblical wisdom will find knowledge.

I once read the story of a young man who stood listening to a teacher in India. The teacher was renowned for his wisdom and the young man greatly desired that reputation. Finally, he approached the wise old teacher and asked the secret of his wisdom. He was willing to do anything, or pay any price he could afford for the wisdom manifested by the teacher. The teacher asked him to follow him. He led him to a river, and when he arrived there he waded out into the river until the water was chest deep.

Suddenly, the teacher reached back and caught the young man behind the neck and forced his head under the water. The student, though shocked by the sudden move, held his breath and waited for the teacher to release him. He held his breath and waited, but the teacher did not release him. With gentle pressure, he tried to raise his head from the water. When the teacher felt the pressure against his hand, he placed the other hand behind the young man's head and held him firmly. The confused student then exerted a little more pressure against the teacher but the teacher leaned his weight on the student's head. The student, now fearing that he could hold his breath no longer, tried to stand up, but the teacher threw himself onto the young man's neck and back.

In a state of panic, the student bent his knees and with all his strength, thrust himself out of the water. With his first breath he turned on the teacher and demanded, "What are you trying to do, drown me?" The wise old teacher replied, "No, but when you desire wisdom as much as you desired air, you will find it."

True wisdom will relentlessly seek knowledge. It will not be denied. This is the reason I know I am not a wise man. I get distracted too easily. For years, I read everything I could find - and understand on the subject of Creation, beginning with hydrologist Henry Morris's *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, and then going on to read books by paleontologist Dwayne Gish, geologist Steve Austin, *Answers in Genesis* founder, Ken Ham, and many others. During the same time, I read and reread everything Francis Shaeffer wrote. I read, marked, highlighted, and made notes through some twenty-two books by written by Shaeffer. Hey, I even bought my wife a book by Edith Shaeffer - I still don't know why she didn't appreciate it. I read all of Shaeffer's books at least twice, some four times. Now that might sound like some weighty reading material, but I have a confession. I often experienced lapses when I would find myself reading Louis L'Amour, while watching Andy Griffith reruns.

3. Wisdom seeks discretion.
  - a. Discretion has to do with discernment.
  - b. Discretion denotes choice.
  - c. Discretion also involves the will.

What this means is that wisdom enables us to make the right choices, and motivates us to act on the decisions we make. The proof of the pudding is in the tasting, and the proof of the wisdom is in the decisions - and the will to act on those decisions. I once listened to a young man sing a solo. Before he sang, he dedicated the song to his deceased grandfather. As he did so, his voice broke and tears

came to his eyes. After the service two people came to me and asked if I didn't think the young man had become suddenly more spiritual. I wanted to agree with them, but I had reservations. So, I said, "I don't know. Let's wait and see what happens when he makes decisions in future." Before long someone told me he had seen this young man riding on a beer truck with a group from his in fraternity buddies in a parade.

The old adage, "What you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you are saying" holds true. True wisdom expresses itself in godly decisions.

## B. The Fear of the Lord, Which Is the Beginning of Wisdom, Is to Hate Evil.

### 1. Wisdom hates Pride.

"I have my pride!" I can remember people boasting of their pride as though it were a virtue. But in the fifty-one times pride is mentioned in the Bible, I have not found one verse that portrays it as a virtue. What I find is the God hates pride. The wisdom that is from God also hates pride, because pride is an affront to the sovereignty of God.

*"By pride comes nothing but strife, But with the well-advised is wisdom"* (Pro. 13:10).

*"Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall"* ( Pro. 16:18).

### 2. Wisdom hates arrogance.

*"Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; **I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud** And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless"* (Isaiah 13:11).

### 3. Wisdom hates "the evil way."

*"**How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!** But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night"* (Psalm 1:1-2).

### 4. Wisdom hates "the perverted mouth."

The Psalmist speaks of one whose

*"... mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness"* (Psalm 10:7).

*They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth"* (Psalm 73:9).

C. Now, Let Us Look at the Positive Side of Wisdom, 8:14-17.

*“Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly. I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me.”*

1. In wisdom there is understanding.
2. In wisdom there is power.
3. By wisdom “rulers decree justice.”
4. By wisdom “princes rule.”
5. By wisdom judges pursue justice.
6. Wisdom loves those who love wisdom.
7. Those who diligently seek wisdom will find.

CONCLUSION. If there is anything we should see in this passage, it is that we should place great value on wisdom. This is the wisdom that has its source in God: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” You cannot attain it, divine it, achieve it, or figure it out through research or logic. But when you are born-again by the grace of God, you are prepared for the wisdom of God.

There are three things that are indispensable to the pursuit of wisdom. First, you must know Jesus Christ the Living Word of the Living God. Second, you must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the divine Author of the Word of God. Third, you must study the Word of God and trust the Holy Spirit to illuminate your mind and heart that you might rightly interpret the Word of God and make an application of it in your daily life.

Now, let me stress one thing. The only source of real wisdom is God the Father, and the greatest manifestation of His wisdom is Jesus Christ. That’s right! Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1). Reject Jesus and you join the lot of those who profess themselves to be wise but become, or, in fact, are made fools (Romans 1:22).

The wisdom of God is specifically seen in that His salvation is made available through grace alone - not works, and not grace plus works. Why? Because the only thing anyone can do is the one thing everyone must do, and that is to believe. If you know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord you have the privilege of walking with Him in wisdom. If you do not know Him personally, the smartest thing you can do is to trust Him for His salvation. Then you may know the wisdom of God. Then you will



find that wisdom which is more precious than jewels and precious stones.