

Pearls from Proverbs

Heavenly Wisdom

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The words of Solomon are profound when he says, “A man’s steps are of the Lord; how can a man understand his own way?” (Prov. 20:24). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted and *italics* have been used within Scripture quotations for emphasis.] This same concept is reflected by Jeremiah, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23). The truth is that there is no man who is able to know the kind of life he should live. Yet, men persist in seeking answers for these three profound questions: (1) Where did I come from? (2) Where am I going, what happens to me when I die? (3) Why am I here? In spite of the fact that all three of these are answered in the Bible, men spend countless hours seeking to find the answers in other places.

Of these three questions the most pressing is, “Why am I here?” Even if one never discovers his origin or his destiny, he is forced to deal with the problems which he confronts. It seems as if every day, situations arise which demand countless decisions, and many of these decisions demand wisdom in making them. How tragic it is that most, in making these choices, ignore the Bible, the only source of true wisdom.

The word of God is the only source to find answers about the meaning of life and how to live it to the fullest. However, man’s first inclination is to turn inward and to

rely upon his own wisdom. Or, he may then turn to those around him for advice, not realizing that they too know so little about what God's Word says. The harsh reality is that no man or group of men possesses the wisdom to know how to live.

WISDOM DEFINED

It is easy to confuse wisdom with knowledge. While knowledge is the basis for wisdom, there is a vast difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge deals with facts gleaned either from education or from life's experiences. Wisdom is the ability to use what we know. There are many who have attained vast storehouses of knowledge, but have little ability to use it. Who has never met an "educated fool"?

Wisdom is the ability to properly understand what is happening. It is the ability to size up a situation and then to react. True wisdom begins with gathering all the facts (knowledge), and then applying it to life. Understanding this helps us see why heavenly wisdom far exceeds any wisdom from men on the earth. Every man's knowledge is limited; he simply cannot know it all. Every man's experience is limited; he has not lived long enough. Heavenly wisdom comes from our eternal Creator who is infinite in every way. He made us. He knows us. He knows the choices we should make in every situation.

THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM

Take a moment to consider how complex life is. How does one handle the many problems presented to him? How does he handle daily stress, job stress, depression, rejection, financial problems, marriage problems, problems with parents, problems with children, problems with in-laws, failing health, getting old, death

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and dying, not being respected, not having friends, not being appreciated, and addiction? The list seems endless because it is! Think about your life and what has happened over the past few days. Situations arose, some of them new and so different from anything you have faced before, and you were called upon to respond. You probably knew most of the facts, but even then you were not able to know with certainty how to respond.

Your life is not unlike the lives of others. Americans are realizing more and more their inability to cope. They want to know for sure that the course they are taking is the right one. This is why we are seeing the rapid increase in the numbers of registered psychologists and psychiatrists (the primary difference between the two is that the psychiatrist has extensive medical training and is authorized to prescribe medication). A search of the internet shows that the American Psychiatric Association, which represents the majority of psychiatrists, has over 40,000 members (Mosher). The American Psychological Association (APA) is a scientific and professional organization that represents, according to their website, 150,000 members (the largest association of psychologists worldwide). The truth is that “employment of psychologists is expected to grow **faster than average** for all occupations through 2014” (Van Wagner).

LOOKING FOR WISDOM IN THE WRONG PLACES

Nearly 200,000 psychiatrists and psychologists – it’s almost frightening. Now add to this number other “specialists” who advertise themselves as counselors and therapists. There is no doubt that we are a troubled nation seeking to find peace of mind in a complex world. Consider how vast that number of other “advisors” must

be. How many times at work, with family or with friends are conversations begun when someone says, “What do you think I should do?” It is in this arena that so many are looking for wisdom.

If the words of Jeremiah are true—“It is not in man who walks to direct his *own* steps” (Jer. 10:23)—how can that man direct the steps of *another*? If the words of Solomon are true—“How can a man understand his *own* way?” (Prov. 20:24)—how can he direct the paths of *another*? Just because one has some notoriety as an advisor does not mean he knows anything about life. There may be times and places where the advice of others can help, but such advice must be measured by recognizing the source of it. Americans are looking for wisdom, but they may not be acting wisely in finding it. Wisdom must be sought in the right place.

GOD’S PROMISE ABOUT FINDING WISDOM

There are many promises of God that are so special, depending on our needs at a particular time. Is there any promise more comforting than the one He made to us through His servant James? “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (Jas. 1:5). The omniscient God has promised to give us wisdom!

Look at the nature of this promise. **First, it is universal to His children.** This book is addressed to Christians wherever they may be found. That “the twelve tribes” (1:1) refers to spiritual Israel is confirmed when we note that the word brethren is found 15 times in this book. The promise is to any person who is His child.

Second, it is conditional. Wisdom will not be given until one asks—“Let him ask of God.” Later in this

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same book James said, “Yet you do not have because you do not ask” (Jas. 4:2). How can anyone have any confidence that the decisions he is making are trustworthy, until he prays for wisdom? The next verse in chapter one adds another condition to receiving wisdom. When we ask, we must ask in faith. “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (1:6). Prayer and faith go hand in hand.

Third, the nature of God is tied to the promise. He does not just give, He gives liberally and generously. Our infinite God never does things in small measures. When the text says He does this “without reproach,” the emphasis is on the way He gives, contrasted with the way others give. They may give sparingly and give “lectures” along with gifts. This is not the nature of our God.

Lastly, remember that the gift of wisdom is absolutely certain. It is not that God gives wisdom to all people some of the time. Nor does He give to some people all of the time. There is no partiality with God, for He gives wisdom to all of His faithful children, all of the time. *The central question of our lives is, how does God give us this heavenly wisdom?*

HEAVENLY WISDOM COMES FROM A MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS

The book of Proverbs was written by Solomon, the wisest man of the Old Testament. The Bible describes the wisdom of this son of David. “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...And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to

hear the wisdom of Solomon...And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon...she said to the king...'I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed *the half was not told me*'...So King Solomon *surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom*" (1 Kgs. 4:29-30, 34; 10:4-6; 2 Chron. 9:22). If anyone knows the source of wisdom, it would be this great and wise king.

Hear the words of Solomon. "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the *multitude of counselors* there is safety...Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the *multitude of counselors* they are established...For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a *multitude of counselors* there is safety" (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6).

If one wants to have wisdom, he must seek counsel, not from just one or two but from several people. The fact that each person has a different background and life experience enables each of them to look at situations from different standpoints. If we want heavenly wisdom, we need to ask several counselors.

HEAVENLY WISDOM COMES FROM GODLY COUNSELORS

We must be careful which "multitude of counselors" we turn to. The pitfall many fall into is a failure to seek advice from counselors who are godly. The first Psalm describes the blessed man as one who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. Every person seeking wisdom must remember these words. We must not make the mistake Solomon's son, Rehoboam, made when he sought counsel. He first sought advice from those older men who had associated with his father. Then he sought the advice of younger men, and he followed them. Because he ignored the advice given by those godly, older

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men, the glorious kingdom he had inherited was divided (1 Kgs. 12:1-20). We must not just ask counsel of anyone, it must be from someone who knows God and lives a godly life.

My experience has been that Christians often turn from the godly people God has put in their lives and turn to the ungodly for advice. When problems arise in their lives, they may go to older Christians seeking help. Not satisfied with what they hear, or wondering if those Christians really know, they often ignore the counsel of the godly and go to the ungodly counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and “walk in the counsel of the ungodly.” There is a place for advice from “specialists,” but that advice must always be evaluated by what the Bible says.

I recall one incident where a godly man was trying to explain to a non-Christian advisor why he could not follow the advice being given to him about divorce. As he explained Matthew 19:9 and its teaching about the one reason the Bible gives for divorce, the counselor then responded, “That is the most barbaric thing I have ever heard.” That counselor may have been highly trained, but there is no way godly advice could be given.

How can individuals who do not believe in the sanctity of marriage be trusted to give advice about saving a marriage? How can people who do not believe in Bible-based corporal punishment give sane advice about disciplining children? How can people who do not understand fundamental principles about sin, and may not even believe in its reality, give counsel about how to deal with sin, with guilt from wrong doing, and the avenue for correcting sinful actions?

Think about it. Is it more reasonable to seek counsel about how to save a marriage from a non-Christian individual who has divorced, perhaps more than once, or

from an older Christian couple who have been married for many years? Have not the years of studying the Bible and applying it to life's situations not taught them anything? They have shown they know how to deal with marriage before they had children, marriage with small children, marriage with teenage children, marriage when the nest became empty.

This principle is taught in the Bible in so many ways. There must be a reason why the Holy Spirit instructs older women to "teach the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit. 2:4-5). The most obvious reason for older women to follow these instructions is because all that has transpired in their lives has equipped them to impart what they have learned to those who are younger. One of the reasons many homes of Christians are in trouble is failure of younger women to see the avenue God has provided for them. Blessed is that younger woman who walks in the counsel of the godly, older women. By implication, this same principle would apply to younger men accepting the counsel of older, Christian men.

HEAVENLY WISDOM COMES FROM THE DIVINE COUNSELOR'S BOOK

Throughout the book of Proverbs, there is a dual approach to the matter of wisdom. First, there is the emphasis on the fact that man cannot know which way he should go. Solomon said, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). Whenever a man turns toward his feelings (or the feelings of others, often solicited by asking, "What do you feel I should do about this?"), even though his feelings

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seem so good, he is headed on a path of doom and destruction. Solomon also showed the folly of making human judgments when he said, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise" (Prov. 12:15).

The other emphasis is that one can trust in God and His advice and be assured of success. The wise man said, "For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught...A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Prov. 3:26; 16:9). Perhaps no passage says it better than when Solomon said, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:5-7).

Isn't it logical that when one begins to seek the *highest* wisdom that he turns to the *highest* source? God not only tells us to seek wisdom from Him, He gives us the Bible, a book of wisdom. The psalmist well understood the place of the Bible in imparting wisdom to use. Read his words carefully, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, *making wise the simple*; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, *enlightening the eyes*; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (Psa. 19:7-9). When seeking wisdom, why should anyone ignore the one book that enlightens the eyes and gives wisdom to the simple?

Now add to this the completeness of this marvelous book which gives wisdom to the simple. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,

thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God has given us a book that perfectly furnishes us in every good work. There is no situation where the Bible does not give instruction about what to do, either by precept or principle. Every Christian must grasp the significance of this truth. When someone asks you, "What do you think I should do," your first thought should be, "What is there in the Bible that impacts the answer to this question?" Do not start giving advice until you have sought advice from the Book which enlightens our eyes and gives wisdom to the simple!

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEAVENLY WISDOM

Our study of heavenly wisdom would not be complete until we look at what James says about wisdom.

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (Jas. 3:13-17).

Wisdom is characterized by meekness

That individual who has true wisdom manifests it by the good conduct of his life and meekness. If you are seeking wisdom, it will not be found from those whose lives are not exemplary. It will not be found in that individual who is proud that he can give advice to

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another. One of the dangers of education is that “knowledge puffs up” (1 Cor. 8:1). The wise man is one who, though he may have reason to be proud, is humble in giving counsel.

Wisdom is not self-seeking

One of the curses of our way of life is the philosophy that says, “I have rights,” “God wants me to be happy,” and “I must first make sure that I am happy, then consider others.” There is an element of truth in each of these statements, but when taken to the extreme they become foolish. America has taken them to the extreme. The world does not revolve around one’s personal needs. True happiness is found in serving others, not in being served. True happiness is found in giving, not in receiving (Acts 20:35). When one places his own needs above the needs of others, the result is “confusion and every evil thing.” This philosophy “does not descend from above” but comes from the heart of Satan. Paul said, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

Wisdom is not earthly, sensual or demonic

Think about these words. If wisdom is not earthly (as contrasted to that which is heavenly), how can one whose life and education does not acknowledge God and truth be trusted as the source of counsel and advice? No wonder the Bible extols the counsel of the godly. If the man whose life is directed by the counsel of the godly is blessed, does this not imply that one whose source of counsel is earthly is cursed?

The word “sensual” is the same word used by Paul in the first two chapters of his first letter to Corinth. There

it is translated as “the natural man.” The natural man is contrasted with the spiritual man. The spiritual man has the revelation of God given to him and he lives by it. The natural man looks on the things of God as foolishness and seeks to know about life by secular means. The truth is that the natural man simply cannot understand the most fundamental aspects of life, for he does not acknowledge God and look first to Him. His counsel and advice is based first on the physical, fleshy nature of man, and this is reflected in the advice he gives. He ignores heaven’s advice, and we should not be surprised that James says such ideas are demonic.

Wisdom is pure

When James begins to give the positive aspects of wisdom, he puts purity at the top of his list. Decisions that result in doing wrong are wrong decisions. As you decide what you should do, it must first pass the test of purity.

Wisdom is peaceable

Children of God are concerned about peace for they have a peace that worldly men cannot begin to understand. Paul said, “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, *which surpasses all understanding*, will guard your hearts and minds” (Phil. 4:6-7). Decisions which are made that do not result in this peace are not wise decisions. There is another aspect of peace, and that is in our relationship with others. Sometimes doing right does not bring about external peace, but we must know our place in these matters. “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

Wisdom is gentle

As I seek to determine a course of action, I must remember that it must be characterized by gentleness. God has shown us in His actions, and in the actions of His Son, how to be firm and unyielding and gentle at the same time. Any action that I do which results in me becoming harsh and rude is not an action of wisdom.

Wisdom is willing to yield

Once again we are reminded from God that decisions which put our own needs first are foolishness. Christianity is a religion of going the second mile, of seeking to serve others, and not stubbornly demanding that others let us have our own way. Jesus said, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12). Putting ourselves in the place of another and asking what we would want to happen if the situation were reversed will often make us yield to them. The philosophy of demanding that others make us happy and ignoring their needs is one that originates in hell!

Wisdom is full of mercy

In dealing with others, we often demand "perfection" of them. Decisions based on this principle are not decisions of wisdom. We must see the good in another and be willing to help him overcome whatever is wrong in his life. Others must know that they can be forgiven and we will accept them. Remember that the kind of mercy we show to others is the kind of mercy He will show to us (Matt. 7:2).

Wisdom is full of good works

In making a decision, we must measure it by the fruits of righteousness in our lives. Will the course of life we have chosen result in the unbiased observer seeing

good works in our lives and glorifying God (Matt. 5:16)? Or will the decision we have made result in others seeing us acting no differently from every other person? James does not just say that wisdom results in good works, he says it is *full* of good works.

Wisdom is without partiality

Our God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He does not have one way of dealing with the high and mighty and another way of dealing with others. He is not condescending to those who are of a lesser state. Jesus Himself was so concerned about the least in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 25:40). Far too many Christians have one standard and way of treating their friends and those they know best in the kingdom of heaven and another way of dealing with others. This is not the way heaven deals with us. God does not have His favorite children, nor does Jesus have His favorite sheep. Decisions that are made must treat those who are closest to us the same as those who are distant from us. Any other decision is not wise.

Wisdom is without hypocrisy

In making a decision, I must be genuine. I cannot appear to be something in dealing with another that is not who I truly am. Whatever I do relative to them will end in disaster when they discover I am not what I appeared to be. Decisions that present us in disingenuous ways are not wise decisions.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This marvelous book of Proverbs is filled with wisdom. Take time to read it. Take time to read it often. Write its brief statements of truth on your heart. Repeat them so often to your children that they become part of their character. Every day decisions must be made, and we

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must have the wisdom to make the best decisions. We must acknowledge that we do not know how to walk. We must seek counsel from a multitude of counselors. We must seek godly counselors. But most of all we must know and use His Word as the basis for all our decisions. Having made decisions, we must wisely evaluate them by those characteristics of wisdom given by James. God will make us wise, but He demands we do our part in finding wisdom. He will give us wisdom in abundance, but we must seek it in His way.

Do you want to be wise? Then heed these words:

My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil (Prov. 3:1-7).

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