

Handout for Chapter 7 – Abiding in Christ

Abridged version of *Treasures of Wisdom* --By: Richard L. Strauss (taken from www.bible.org)

Suppose that you owned one of those famous magic lamps, and your own private genie promised to grant you anything in this world you desired. What would you ask for? Wealth would probably be one of the most popular requests. Some think more money would solve almost all their problems. Good health might also rate high, particularly among those who have lost it. Happiness would be the leading desire for others. One worldwide poll of young people revealed happiness as the number one goal in life.

There was a man who had such a choice offered him, not by a fictitious genie, but by the true and living God. God appeared to King Solomon one night and said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” Solomon answered, “Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of Yours?” (2 Chronicles 1:7,10 NIV) God was pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom rather than riches, honor, long life, or victory over his enemies, so He granted his request. Scripture testifies that all Israel “saw that *the wisdom of God* was in him” (1 Kings 3:28).

God has wisdom, infinite and perfect wisdom. Job was willing to admit that, even while he was enduring grievous affliction that made no sense at all to him. “With Him are wisdom and might,” he declared (Job 12:13). The Prophet Daniel said much the same thing after God supernaturally revealed to him Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its meaning: “wisdom and power belong to Him” (Daniel 2:20). The fact is well established in Scripture—our God is distinguished by wisdom.

The Meaning of God’s Wisdom

What is wisdom? The words used in Scripture have the idea of skill and expertise. For example, Bezalel had the wisdom to make artistic designs in gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood for the tabernacle (cf. Exodus 31:1-5). When he did his work, he had a goal in mind, a plan to reach that goal, the proper materials to use, and the skill to bring it all about. When applied to God, wisdom seems to refer to His establishing the best goals and choosing the best and most effective means to accomplish them.

Wisdom is mental excellence in its greatest sense, more comprehensive and far-reaching than mere knowledge. Knowledge is an awareness and understanding of the facts. Wisdom is the ability to adapt those facts into accomplishing a desired end. God knows all the facts, but also has the ability to work everything He knows into a perfect plan that accomplishes His perfect purpose.

God never faces a situation He cannot handle or a problem He cannot solve. We certainly do. I often get myself into predicaments where I simply do not know which way to turn or what action is best to take. When I face a major decision I try to gather all the facts, because a person’s decisions are only as good as his information. But even with all the facts, I still may not know the best course to take, because I lack the wisdom God has. But God is the master of every situation. He knows all the facts, and He knows how to use every one of them to attain the perfect results. Nobody else can do that. God’s wisdom is unique. That is why Paul called Him “the only wise God” (Romans 16:27). God alone has perfect wisdom in and of Himself. All other wisdom is merely a reflection of His.

The Expressions of God’s Wisdom

Everything that God does reveals His wisdom, but several specific things are mentioned in Scripture. For instance, creating the world was an expression of His wisdom. O LORD, how many are Thy works! In wisdom Thou hast made them all; The earth is full of Thy possessions (Psalm 104:24, cf. Proverbs 3:19).

God put the universe together in such a manner that it displays not only His goodness, but also His wisdom. And that brings glory to Him. The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands (Psalm 19:1).

A second expression of God’s wisdom was sending His Son. Jesus Christ is the personification of God’s wisdom. In the eighth chapter of the book of Proverbs, wisdom cries out for men to hear. It seems to be a person, and the further we read the more convinced we become. He existed from everlasting, before the earth was. He was the Father’s delight and rejoiced in the Father’s presence (Proverbs 8:22-23,30). Wisdom can be none other than the eternal Son of God. The Apostle Paul calls Him “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). In Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

If you want to get to know the God of wisdom, study the life of Jesus Christ. As a boy, He “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). When He began His public ministry, He taught with such penetrating perception and amazing authority that people asked, “Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers?” (Matthew 13:54) He confronted the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees with such crisp thinking that they could not answer Him (e.g. Matthew 22:46). They had the finest theological minds of the day, but their mouths were stopped before the wisdom of Jesus Christ. God gave the world the most complete and comprehensive demonstration of His wisdom possible when He sent His Son to earth. And it brought great glory to Him. Near the end of Christ’s life He could say to His Father, “I have brought you glory on earth” (John 17:4 NIV).

However, that was not the final expression of God’s wisdom. He likewise discloses it by redeeming the lost. “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). The people of the world think they can get to know God by using their own human wisdom. God knows they cannot, so in perfect wisdom He has provided a way. His wisdom seems like foolishness to them, but through it, He manages to deliver people from their bondage to sin and bring them into a satisfying relationship with Himself. How does He do it? Paul goes on to tell us: “For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

Christ crucified! That is the means God has provided for mankind to know Him. To the average unbeliever it seems ridiculous to think that God’s Son should have to die on a cross to pay the penalty for man’s sin. But that is the heart of God’s wisdom, the message that brings eternal salvation. The death of God’s sinless Son was necessary to satisfy His offended holiness, deliver mankind from bondage to sin, and open the door to His presence.

Those who believe that message are brought into a living union with God through Jesus Christ and become members of His Church. Nothing displays God's wisdom and demonstrates His glory more dramatically than that body of redeemed sinners who have been eternally forgiven and accepted by His grace. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 3:10 NIV). Because it displays His wisdom it also glorifies Him. "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph 3:21 KJV). God has another way of expressing His wisdom—by *ordering the lives of believers*.

Man's steps are ordained by the Lord, How then can man understand his way? (Proverbs 20:24)

God in wisdom has already mapped out the course of our lives to bring the greatest glory to Himself. His wise plan even includes the means by which He will use our volitional choices, some of which may be contrary to His desires, in order to achieve His perfect end, as difficult as that may be for us to understand.

His plan also includes the means by which He will use the trying circumstances in our lives to achieve His perfect goal. We can trust Him in the dark places of life, because He in His wisdom knows the way through the darkness. Maybe you have visited one of the world's famous caverns. If you have, you were probably led through it by a guide. You trusted him and committed yourself to him because you were confident that he knew the way. To refuse to follow him would not only have endangered your own life, it would have insulted his wisdom. To do anything less than commit ourselves completely to our Lord in simple trust during the troubling times in our lives is to insult His wisdom. To resist Him, question Him, doubt Him, or criticize what He allows in our lives is to deny that He is the only wise God, and claim that we are wiser than He.

We may not always enjoy what God does, but our enjoyment is not His primary goal. Our happiness will come, but it will come as we grow in the likeness of His Son. That is His great goal for our lives, because as we grow to be more like Jesus, not only will we experience greater happiness ourselves, but God's principal goal of bringing glory to Himself will also be fulfilled. Allowing trials to enter our experience is part of His wise plan to accomplish His perfect end. To understand His wisdom in ordering our lives will help us to lay hold of His peace in the disturbing circumstances of life.

The Enjoyment of God's Wisdom

The most exciting aspect of God's wisdom is that He offers to share it with us. Many of us would be willing to admit that we could use a large supply of it in order to handle the circumstances we confront daily. Having God's wisdom does not necessarily mean we will know *why* God allows certain things to happen to us or *how* He will work them together for good. It simply means that we will know the right thing to do in each situation, the thing that will bring the greatest glory to Him.

Scripture makes it clear that we need divine wisdom. Solomon devoted nearly nine chapters in the book of Proverbs to the need for wisdom. Just as he sought it from God, so he encourages us to do likewise: "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7 NIV). The New Testament echoes that need: "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Again, real wisdom is basically knowing the right thing to do in every situation—knowing and doing the will of God.

The Recognition of God's Wisdom

How do we know whether the wisdom we are exercising is from God or from men, whether it is divine wisdom or human wisdom? One way will be to compare it to the truth of God's Word. His wisdom will always be consistent with all of His Word. But there is one special passage in the Word that tells us particularly how to identify God's wisdom: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). Here is the acid test. First, God's wisdom is *pure*, unmixed with error, untainted by immorality, unclouded by selfish motives, cleansed of all personal ambition. If we are looking out for our own interests, we are probably operating by man's wisdom rather than God's. Secondly, God's wisdom is *peaceable*, not quarrelsome, contentious, or cutting, but promoting the harmony and peace that draws people together. If our words or actions are arousing antagonism in others, we are probably operating by man's wisdom rather than God's. Thirdly, God's wisdom is *gentle*, that is, fair, moderate, forgiving, forbearing, and considerate in the demands it puts on others. If we are putting pressure on others to conform to our way of thinking, we are probably operating by man's wisdom rather than God's. Fourthly, God's wisdom is *reasonable*, easy to be entreated, not stubborn or inflexible, but pliable and willing to listen to reason. If we have already made up our minds and refuse to be influenced by any more facts, we are probably operating by man's wisdom rather than God's. Fifthly, God's wisdom is *full of mercy and good fruits*. It shows genuine concern and extends practical help toward others in need, even when they have wronged us. Sixthly, God's wisdom is *unwavering*, not hesitant or vacillating, but standing firm on Biblical principles, undivided in allegiance to God and consistent from day to day. And finally, God's wisdom is *without hypocrisy*. When we are operating by God's wisdom we do not wear masks, play roles, or deceive people by putting on a good front. We do not try to conceal our true thoughts, feelings, or motives in order to make ourselves look good or to accomplish our own ends. We are open, honest, and straightforward.

Here is God's standard for measuring His wisdom. When we begin to get our wisdom from Him, our homes will be happier, our lives more effective, and our God greatly glorified. And there is really no time to lose. As the Psalmist put it, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom" (Psalm 90:12 KJV).

Action To Take:

What difficulties are you presently facing? Ask God for wisdom in handling them. Measure your words and actions by the sevenfold standard of divine wisdom revealed in James 3:17. If you have doubt about whether you are operating by man's wisdom or God's wisdom in any one of the seven, ask other members of your family what they think, then prayerfully consider their advice.