

Wisdom: Good Thinking by Good People

While knowledge is a human subject, wisdom is a divine subject. We humans have, from the beginning of our existence, been obsessed with knowing things. This passion to know more about everything is one of the things that defines us from the rest of the animals. It is part of our having been "created in the image of a God," who does know everything.



"Gift of Wisdom"

However, when the Bible talks about "knowing," it is predominantly in the sense of "living what we know." That is, *being smart* is not of much value unless it is coupled up with *being good*. Homer wrote in the *Odyssey*, "For never, never, wicked man was wise." These two concepts of goodness and knowledge are coupled together in a word called wisdom. The word wisdom is used 192 times in the Bible, while the word wise is used 215 times. This gives us a clue as to how important it is to combine knowledge with goodness.

Wisdom is not only a way of knowing; it is also a way of acting. We can be right about what we know and wrong about the way we act and still be foolish. Many smart people are foolish.

Wisdom is a grand goal for all humans. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all your getting, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7). This sentence was either collected or written by Solomon, a man of uncommon experience, learning, opportunity, and power. I believe this advice from Solomon cannot be set aside without extreme arrogance.

Wisdom is the habit of choosing the most worthy and valuable object of pursuit, then using the most proper meaning of attaining it. In the Bible, wisdom refers to our interest in things that last and values that endure; it is the ability to see things in view of the "long haul." It is setting up and committing ourselves to long term goals, which often reach beyond time into eternity. In that sense, the pursuit of wisdom takes faith, for the "pay-off" may be in the next life; but, we pursue it anyway. Wisdom assumes justice; it believes that all will give an account to God at some future time.

In the Psalms and Proverbs wisdom is descriptive of religion, while folly is used of sin. For example, "Fools mock at sin" (Proverbs 14:9). "The fool says in his heart, no God" (Psalm 14:1). According to Proverbs 1:7, "Fools despise wisdom." By way of contrast, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10).

In Job 28:12, Job asked the question, "Where shall wisdom be found?" His search took him all over the earth, under the sea, up into the air with the eagle, and down into the mines. Yet Job found no final truth on the earth itself. His conclusion was that truth is found in the one who is true, "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Proverbs 28:28). Wisdom is found in the creator and source of all things --not in the things themselves.

Humans cannot be wise without God because they are finite (limited) and never know the whole truth about anything. William Cowper wrote in *The Task*, "God never meant that man should scale the

heavens by strides of human wisdom." If wisdom is knowledge combined with good, then that knowledge must be true. We are always surprised when something comes along to contradict our perception. Yet, without God we have no complete perspective. Without God we lack the perspective of the original designer of all. Because of this, we are in no position to tell whether a thing is true or not.

That which appears to be true now may not be later. Because our observational powers are faulty and limited, we often misinterpret what we see. Things that seemed true 100 years ago do not seem true now; things that seem true now will not seem true 100 years from now --to say nothing of 1,000 years from now. Only 500 years ago we were still arguing about whether the sun revolved around the earth and whether the earth was flat. Even today, astronomy books are good for only two to three years. Two thousand years ago many people thought the earth was supported by a large elephant or a large turtle -- that would be a very large turtle.

Even historic knowledge is never absolutely true. Who did discover America? Christopher Columbus or Leif the Lucky? --Maybe there was someone before Leif Erikson for all we know. How did the Native American get here? It appears that America had already been discovered when we arrived. Maybe, they thought that would be obvious to us. Job looked all over the earth, under the sea, into the skies, and deep into the mines and could not find an unchangeable, immutable, complete answer to anything.

Even the market value of knowledge is always changing. Skills that were once important are now valueless. And it doesn't take hundreds of years either. Does anyone have a need to hire someone with a good knowledge of how to run a 2.0 version of WordPerfect software on the computer? Right next door to the Austinville Church, in the area of our church park, there was a man named Charles Teeter who operated a blacksmith shop on a 49 1/2 by 115 1/2 foot piece of land. The world has very little use for Mr. Teeter's talents in our day.

There is another problem; people are not always capable of reporting what is true. It is only in our own day that we are beginning to get an "Indian's eye view" of General George Custer. In addition, people often exaggerate, and embellish --they always interpret history to make themselves look the best. Nor can they ever see the entire forest because the trees always get in the way.

No, history is not always true, and it is never entirely true. History is prejudicially written by those who are in power (those who win), and even when the powers change, time itself, may take us too far away from the original event to see it correctly. Who do you consider the founder of General Motors? William Durant or Alfred Sloan. Alfred would like you to think it was him. Do the English look at the American Revolution the same as the Americans? Certainly not. Which history is true? The answer is both and neither. Does the South look at the Civil War the same as the North? The answer is, they are beginning to, as the Northerners continue to move to Florida, become Southerners, and decisively take the South. Still, there is great resistance to that!

Though the Bible does not contain recent history, it does contain the truth about ancient history. God has protected the record of the Bible in a special way. Sometimes, we don't like what we read about ourselves in its pages; however, it is still true. We usually write only nice things about ourselves. The Bible writes everything. The Bible contains history that can be found no other place. For example, at one time historians disclaimed the existence of the Hittites mentioned in the Bible. Yet, now we have discovered the archeological remains of that ancient civilization. Our knowledge is always incomplete.

The wisdom of the Bible will always be valuable. Now, you say, "Men travel 2,000 miles an hour today; how can the Bible be relevant?" Well, the Bible is mostly a book about people. People can be sinners whether they travel 2,000 miles an hour or 2 miles an hour. People can still lack peace. People can still beat their children. People can still get drunk. People can still be absolutely miserable. They can still

miss the purpose of life. They can still be hungry, sick, weary, and lonely. They can still become downright discouraged, whether they are walking, riding a horse, or flying in a jet airplane.

So, conditions are still the same with people, and the Bible still speaks to the very same needs.

True religion and wisdom are the same, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding" (Job 28:28).

So, all true religion must be based upon knowledge that is true.

Yet, true religion is not just a firm persuasion of the truth of Christianity. It is not just doctrinal information about the Bible. Such knowledge is often no different than a study of mathematics. To be real, Christian doctrine must be acted upon and felt, as well as known. It is true, we must be "ready to give an answer to everyone who asks for a reason of the hope which is in us." And it is also true that we must "know whom we have believed." The knowledge must be from *felt* experience.

On the other hand, true religion is not just experience either. Some people count upon highly-excited feelings to validate their Christianity. Yet, they never look into the possible sources from which those emotions may originate. Emotions do not all come from God even when you are in church. Emotions are often religion without revelation. In countries where revelation (that is, the Bible) is unknown, the notions respecting a supreme being often resemble madness. We do have a revelation; therefore, it is up to us to know it and not be like the ancient Samaritans who "knew not what they worshipped."

Again, what is true religion? *True religion is thinking, feeling, and acting rightly in respect to God and others.* If we do not think about God at all, there can be no religious feelings which may lead to religious conduct. To think rightly about God, we must listen to what God has to say about himself.

There must be something to guide our religion. All religious feelings which are not the result of *knowledge* and *faith* must, in turn, be *enthusiasm* or *superstition*. And that is exactly what we see where people do not have the Bible. On the other hand, all knowledge (even true knowledge) in religion that does not produce a devotional affection must be *hypocrisy* or *speculation*, rather than faith. Knowledge about God ought to produce feelings toward God.

For example: If we know that God loves us, we will love him. "We love him because he first loved us." There is feeling *because of* knowledge. So, we *adore* his majesty. We *revere* his sovereignty. We *wonder* at his creative genius. We are *grateful* to him as our benefactor. We *place confidence* in him as Father and friend. These feelings are responses to specific knowledge we have about God.

So, right feelings depend upon right knowing. We get our knowledge on the subject of God from the Bible.

Finally, we must admit, there are people who think right and they act right who have no true religion. Right acting can come from *acting*. However, in the case of true religion, right acting is the result of true knowledge and deep-felt emotions. So that, we think right, feel right, and act right. Feelings are a part of all true religion.

To be wise, one must be *whole*, and one must be genuine. Our feelings, thinking, and acting are all involved; and these are the sum of what is called wisdom in the Bible. Where may we get that? I think we get that truth from Christ, Jesus did said, "I am the way the truth and the life." Remember, we're in the Old Testament –and, what do you do when you are in the Old Testament? You look for Jesus –that's what you do. Jesus said, "Search the scriptures; they are they that testify of Me" (John 5:39).

I think finding wisdom is finding Christ. Listen to these passages from Corinthians. "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). "But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Once again, the New Testament is always the best commentary on the Old Testament.

No matter what else you might want to say about getting wisdom as the principle thing, you've said it all when you say, "Getting wisdom is getting Jesus." Since we don't know the way, it only makes sense to follow someone who does. Christ is where goodness and truth meet.

To love and follow Christ is not only true knowing, it is also a good way to live. Wisdom is good reasoning by good people. Wisdom is following Christ.