

But Where shall Wisdom Be Found?

"Wisdom is the principle thing, Get Wisdom" - Proverbs 4:7

Wisdom is something we do not naturally possess - something we must have for salvation. Something we can never naturally possess. Wisdom is divine education, spiritual training, the learning, absorbing and practicing of eternal truth. It is a full-time occupation, a life-time job.

Wisdom is spiritual-mindedness. In his beautiful discourse on divine wisdom at the beginning of 1st Cor., Paul says - "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual discerneth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." Wisdom is knowing and doing that which is for the best - living in harmony with eternal facts. The Bible says all others are fools.

Wisdom is wanting to stand right out in the bright light of the Spirit's revelation and thoroughly examine ourselves - within and without - by it; then striving to eliminate all that is out of harmony with God, and develop what pleases Him.

Wisdom is the examining of every act and activity and asking, has this any eternal value? Does it help in the way of life? Could I be doing something more profitable, more spiritually beneficial, more pleasing to God? Something more mature, less juvenile?

The Scriptures continually contrast wisdom with folly, saying that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. There are many scriptural words translated "fool" and "folly," indicating different aspects of foolishness. The original meanings are; perverse, wilful, boaster, self-confident, empty, senseless, thoughtless, unwise, witless, dull.

The Scriptures apply all these terms to those who do not have the wisdom to walk in the narrow way that leads to life - the spiritually enlightened way of wisdom - those who do not strive to bring every thought into captivity to Christ.

The principle word for "fool" in the Old Testament is KESEEL - self-confident, relying on self. Self-confidence, self-dependent, self-reliance, relying upon and being guided and motivated by natural thinking - considered maturity and wisdom by the world - is really the mark of the fool. The Scripture says: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:26)

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The Scriptures make it clear that naturally we have no wisdom. Our natural condition is folly and ignorance, regardless of how well educated in worldly knowledge. We may have a mechanical, animal cleverness, but never wisdom, for the Scriptures speak of all worldly knowledge as foolishness. The Scriptures measure wisdom and folly by the final result achieved. There is no other reasonable standard. By this standard only one thing is wisdom, and that is godliness, for all else - regardless of how clever or prosperous or spectacular in achievement - leads only to the devouring worms of the grave at last. Where is Aristotle? Where is Da Vinci? Where is Newton? Where is Einstein? They had tremendous animal mental power, far beyond normal - but no wisdom. They are wormy dust.

Only one path leads to life. All other activities lead to death. Therefore it alone is wisdom. And anything in life that does not contribute to this one purpose is folly - stupidity - idiocy: no word is too strong, the issues are so great! It will help us a lot if we will honestly give our every action its proper label. Classification is the beginning of Order. Face the facts. Face the Light. We may

still DO it, but let us at least, frankly, face the facts and label it clearly as wisdom or folly, according to whether it contributes to godliness or not.

We shall find, if we are honest, that much of our activity we will have to call folly. If we have any depth of sincerity toward God, things will soon lose their appeal if we frankly recognize them as time and life-wasting folly. We are told that "The righteous shall scarcely be saved" (1 Pet 4:18). If this be so, it is surely folly indeed to spend any time and effort on anything that does not contribute to the attainment of salvation.

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It is of utmost importance - yea, it is absolutely vital - that we perceive the clear distinction between true wisdom - the wisdom of God - and every aspect of that which the world considers wisdom. They are not only different, they are completely incompatible - diametric opposites, like light and darkness. They ARE Light and Darkness. All throughout Scripture, the thoughts of natural man are described as false, foolish, vain: "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps aright" (Jer 10:23). And "directing the steps aright" is the very essence of wisdom.

The present world, the present generation of man, for all its cleverness, and ingenuity, and education and self-glorification - for all its computers, earth-orbits, moon shots, and space probes - is no closer to true wisdom, but rather further from it; for all these things - all these accomplishments - are detriments to the acquirement of true spiritual wisdom which must begin with a true estimation of man's natural ignorance and folly. Jesus said - "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes, for so it seemed good in Thy sight" (Matt. 11:25).

This is a divine principle of action that is vitally important to recognize - Wisdom is given by God only to those who fully realize the foolishness and emptiness of all natural man's thoughts, INCLUDING THEIR OWN, and who seek His guidance in love and faith and trust.

In the first 3 chapters of 1st Corinthians. Paul gives the divine estimation of all human thinking and natural attainment, and fully exposes its utter folly and emptiness. He completely clears the ground of all human fabrications and conceptions - "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. "The wisdom of this world comes to naught. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."

And he finally sums it up decisively and conclusively, dismissing all human learning as a stumbling-block in the way of life - "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, LET HIM BECOME A FOOL, that he may be wise." Let him put it all behind him as empty human folly, as Paul did all his human learning - CAST IT OFF as a useless hurtful thing - "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

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Let us, then, consider what the Scriptures say about wisdom. In the Old Testament, the word occurs about 100 times. It occurs 8 times in connection with those who helped build the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, then 26 times in the record concerning Solomon, 100 times in Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and a few times in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel - the 4 major prophets.

It occurs first in Exod. 28:3 - "Thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him."

In Exod. 35:26, they are spoken of as those - "Whose hearts stirred them up in wisdom." Here is illustrated that combination of God and man working together that is the key to salvation. Frequently we are told that wisdom must be hunted for as treasure, cried after, diligently sought and striven after, through study and meditation upon the Word of God.

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TWO-THIRDS of all the occurrences of this word wisdom are in the life or writings of Solomon. Here was a man with every possible advantage, and he started out so well, and so wisely. God gave him wisdom beyond any before or since, save Jesus himself. And yet the record is that when he was old, his alien, worldly wives turned away his heart from God. For all his wisdom, he was led into folly, even though he writes so clearly and forcefully in Ecclesiastes of the utter vanity of the present, and the wisdom of serving God. It is very sad, very instructive.

We may ask, what is the value of wisdom if the man who had the most was a failure? Solomon's failure does not detract anything from the value of wisdom. What it does teach is the tremendous power of the flesh, that it could cause such a capable, well-blessed man to turn aside from wisdom. Perhaps Solomon's incomparable blessings caused his heart to be lifted up in pride, and pride is but a very small step to stupidity. Pride so easily blinds wisdom's eyes, and leads it helplessly captive. The proud are ready dupes for the most foolish and blatant deceptions.

God is just in all His ways. Where much is given, much is expected. "We must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom." Solomon's wisdom served a divine purpose. He was used to record essential teachings, and to manifest a striking lesson, but it did not give him an unfair advantage. His testing was in accord with his privileges, and he failed, because he forsook the way of wisdom. We can never take salvation for granted. It is a matter of all-out effort, and fear and trembling.

Solomon's case is a marvelous illustration of the direct operation of God upon a man, combined with the wonder of responsible individual free-will. God's special gifts for certain purposes never affect or interfere with the individual working out of their salvation. This is a marvel we cannot understand, but must accept as essential to the justice of God.

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The first Scriptural discussion on wisdom is in Job 28. Here is described in beautiful language the tremendous efforts men will put forth to extract the hidden treasures of the earth. No labor is too great, no danger too terrifying - man will seek treasures and fame with lifelong dedication - "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

After all this it enquires - "But where shall wisdom be found? . . . "Man knoweth not the price thereof: "Neither is it found in the land of the living." "The depth saith, it is not in me. The sea saith, It is not in me. "It cannot be gotten for gold. It is greater than all treasures. "WHENCE THEN COMETH WISDOM? "God understandeth the way thereof, and unto man He saith - "BEHOLD THE FEAR OF THE LORD, THAT IS WISDOM, AND TO DEPART FROM EVIL IS UNDERSTANDING:"

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IN THE well-known 90th Psalm, which is attributed to Moses, occurs this prayer - "We spend our years as a tale that is told. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." This is the whole secret of life. So often these words are repeated on occasions of sorrow or loss, but how little we truly heed them!"

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, and it shall be given him" - James 1:5.

We come now to the Proverbs, the heart of the subject. The Book begins - "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel. "To know wisdom and instruction: to perceive the words of understanding: "To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice and judgment."

The purpose of the Book is to impress us with the importance of wisdom; to teach us the emptiness and foolishness of our natural minds; to try and awaken us to the urgency of our need to search tearfully for wisdom - "To be fleshly-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is LIFE and peace" Rom. 8:6. And only by the constant absorption of divine wisdom do we ever become or stay "spiritually-minded."

The present is so real, and presses so closely upon us, that all things tend to encourage and feed the mind of the flesh. Attaining divine wisdom is slow and uphill and laborious for our mortal minds, and most of us are very lazy mentally. But only those who struggle all the night, and overcome, will gain the prize.

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V.7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." A recognition of the reality and authority of God is the very beginning of all true learning. The Scriptures say that anyone who does not recognize the reality of God, and make Him the center of all their thinking, is a FOOL This is basic - there is no use sugar-coating it; no use going any further until this is learned.

Wisdom does not hide from man. Her advertisements are everywhere in creation around us, V 20 - "Wisdom crieth without. She uttereth her voice in the streets. She crieth in the chief place of concourse. . ." The Scriptures tell us that God's wisdom and power and divinity cry out continually in all the beauty and order of creation, and that any who cannot see His hand in it all are blind fools. And this testimony is true. The recognition of God is the very beginning of the opening of the eyes to Light. All wisdom, all true knowledge and understanding, must start there. Prov. 1:22 continues Wisdom's urgent plea - "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and scorners delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge?"

Let us take what instruction is due us from these words. WE DO NOT STAND ABOVE AND BEYOND THEM. We ALL fall far short in our appreciation of, and search for, divine wisdom. We drift along from day to day, largely taking salvation for granted. These strong words of exhortation are to rouse us from such fatal self-deception. We are at school, with much to master, the time is short, and the judgment seat will determine with terrible finality, whether we have passed or failed. There will be much bitter weeping and gnashing of teeth then, for wasted time and lost opportunity, but it will be too late. Many parents who have berated their children for failing to study will find they themselves have failed far more grievously.

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CHAPTER 2 emphasizes this theme that the attainment of the knowledge of God that alone is life eternal is a matter of prolonged and intense yearning. We must go forth every day consciously determined to use every effort and opportunity TO KNOW MORE AND MORE OF GOD - of the deep things of His revelation and manifestation.

We can never be content with shallowness; yea, we can never be content AT ALL. We must have a sense of pressing urgency - of knowing so little - of having so much to learn - so much to develop - so little time to spare. "Great peace have they that love Thy law, and NOTHING shall offend them" Ps. 119. Is not this an infinite desirable condition? Have we "great peace?" It comes only to those whose roots are deep in the knowledge of God. If we do not have peace, that is a danger sign. Solomon says here - "My son, IF thou criest after knowledge and liftest up thy

voice for understanding . . . "If thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures , "THEN shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. "For the Lord giveth wisdom" Prov. 2:1-6.

James says (1:5) - "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . .and it SHALL be given him." But he warns (v.6) - "But let him ask in faith . . ."A doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways . . ."Let not that man think that he shall receive anything." It must be in pure singleness of heart. All other interests must be put away. "If thine eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light."

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Prov. 10 speaks of - "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul." The way of life is not an arbitrary or mechanical set of rules. It is a glorious, personal, joyful, exciting relationship with the Father, the eternal Fountainhead of all glory, joy and love.

Beauty is that which is pleasant to the senses, and it is the opening up to our understanding of the beauty of holiness that makes knowledge pleasant to our soul. Who can desire the ugliness of the flesh when their eyes have been opened to the beauty of holiness" The flesh is ugly, terribly ugly; ugly in its self-centered and self-destructive stupidity. All its reactions are ugly, in ourselves and in others, and the more clearly we can see its ugliness, by comparing it with the beauty of holiness, the more we shall seek to overcome it.

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Prov. 3 gives further instruction in the way of wisdom (vs 5-6) - "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Here is a wonderful promise - "In ALL thy ways acknowledge Him, and He SHALL direct thy paths." God will not "direct our paths" unless we on our part "acknowledge Him in ALL our ways." There can be no holding back. Continually uppermost in the mind at all times must be the remembrance of God and a desire to please Him, which is stronger than any other desire. If we do not have this, let us stick with it and think it through until we clearly see there is no other sensible or satisfactory way to live.

God said to Israel, and it applies to all - "Be not as the horse or mule, which have no understanding." Most people live like the horse and the mule. They never do any real thinking. They live by custom, and desire, and habit, and emotion, and self-gratification. God's people must be different.

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The end of Prov. 3 gives two aspects of an important divine principle - just to whom God gives wisdom - v.32 - "His secret is with the RIGHTEOUS." v.34 - "He giveth grace unto the LOWLY."

Life-giving wisdom is a precious gift of God to those alone who seek to please Him and conform to His desires. The way of wisdom is defined in the words of Paul to the Philippians: "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule." If we truly seek divine wisdom, we must honestly and consistently walk according to what we already understand, and put away what we know to be out of harmony with divine perfection. Otherwise we mock God by asking for more guidance.

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Proverbs 8 is a beautiful exhortation by Wisdom herself, personified as the everpresent hand-maiden of God in all His works. It would well repay daily reading and meditation. She freely offers to men ALL peace, ALL happiness, ALL well-being, ALL joy. She crieth everywhere, seeking men's attention, seeking to turn them from death to life, and from sorrow to joy, from

natural poverty to true spiritual wealth. Why must wisdom and life cry in vain, while all the world flocks after folly and emptiness and death?

What a sad commentary on mankind! Are we so foolish as to join in these meaningless, juvenile pursuits of entertainment, pleasures, acquiring of wealth, and constant childish time-wasting play - rushing headlong to the eternal oblivion of the grave? Let us be men in understanding, and recognize the true divine, eternal values of life.

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Wisdom says in this 8th. chapter - Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. "For Wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. "By me kings reign. :I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." Here is an intimation that many leave the search for wisdom until too late. God is not mocked. When He decides we have had ample opportunity, He often closes the door and sends strong delusion. We never know when the door will suddenly be closed.

Wisdom continues - "I cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasure . . ." "Substance" here is surely a well-chosen word. "Substance" implies permanence, solidity, reality, durability. Substance is what we want -not the vapor and froth and bubble of the passing world . . .

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." Here, perhaps, is wisdom's greatest characteristic. It is eternal. It is divine. In the great scope of infinity, folly is but for a fleeting moment, but wisdom gives life for ever and ever and ever.

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IN every Scriptural subject we are finally led to the same point. All points forward and finds its fulfilment in one man - the only REAL man -the only COMPLETE man that ever lived - the embodiment and perfect fulfilment of the divine wisdom of the ages.

Isaiah declares (11:2) - "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Here are "The seven spirits" - the seven-fold Spirit of the Deity before the throne" - The spirit of the Lord, of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord. The seven pillars of Wisdom's temple - all the aspects of Wisdom - understanding, counsel, knowledge, the fear of the Lord and might. And Paul says, in the chapters in Corinthians on wisdom to which we have referred - "Christ Jesus is of God made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification and Redemption." Here is the true life-giving Wisdom before which all the wisdom of the world stands naked foolishness. "Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption."

Christ is our wisdom, and our wisdom is Christ - "In him, and through him, and because of him, are all things." "In him," declared Paul to the Colossians - "Are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Let us therefore live in him and for him - grow up into him in the wisdom of God through the Word, for "Wisdom is the principle thing."

- G.V.G. - May, June 1962.