

## **“True Wisdom Begins and Ends With God”**

**Proverbs 2:6-16; 1 Corinthians 2:1-13**

Rev. Dr. Tom LaBonte; July 16, 2023

**PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION:** Heavenly Father, You are all wisdom and truth. Share your wisdom with us this morning in the Scripture read and the message proclaimed. Enable us to embrace Your wisdom and reject the ways of the world that are a pale shadow of Your way and will for living the Christian life. Amen.

Wisdom is traditionally understood as making sound decisions with good judgment in relationships with others. It is also described as sharing life experiences helping people as a mentor, coach, advisor, and friend. The wise person traditionally lives a life of moderation serving as an example for others. Unfortunately, this definition and these values have slipped in our society. There are some people today who consider wisdom as something used for personal gain. For them the wise person is shrewd in figuring out how to achieve financial and personal success, not always with regard for how or what is done. This is not just a 2023 issue but it is the narrative that is part of the story of humanity.

Our journey this morning begins with a King, blessed by God and renowned for his wisdom. King Solomon is lifted up by God in **1 Kings Chapter 3** as a faithful and obedient servant. God appears to him in a dream saying: *“Ask whatever you want me to give you.”* Think of the tempting thoughts we might entertain for all the things we may want or need. God is offering him an open-ended gift, a blank check!

Solomon replies in **1 Kings 3:9**: *“So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.”* Solomon is a true servant of God with the humility not to seek self-advantage but request the gift of wise judgment to better serve God’s people. God answers in **1 Kings 3:12-13**: *“I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – riches and honor – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.”*

Solomon approaches God with reverence and humility asking for the wisdom to govern His people. His wish is granted and he is renowned within Israel and throughout the ancient world as the wisest King of all time. He shares his insights on wisdom by authoring Proverbs as the jewel among the wisdom books of the Bible. In **Proverbs Chapter 2:6-15** Solomon teaches the Godly life of wisdom Jesus later lives. Hear the wisdom of God revealed to Solomon: *“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who have left the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.”*

The Hebrew word for wisdom is *Hokmah*. It is a righteous wisdom of goodness, discernment, knowledge, and judgment applied with love. Solomon receives this wisdom as a gift of grace from God. He speaks for God teaching the wise person will choose to live the gift of *Hokmah* and enjoy a successful and happy life. To choose the path of righteous wisdom means having the strength of faith to avoid and reject temptation from those who do not live a Godly life.

This wisdom lived and commended to us by Jesus and Solomon is taught by Paul to the Greeks. He writes to the **Cor in Chapter 2** and to the Athenians in **Acts** on his concern for the educated elite who live by worldly wisdom. The Greeks perceive the value of wisdom as something gained through

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human effort and learning. This kind of wisdom was viewed as a mark of maturity and intellectual achievement. For them a mature, wise person has life and its advantages figured out. Paul, with great courage, tells them this worldly wisdom is not Godly. He commends to them living the wisdom of Jesus Christ, who in his love and saving grace, had the humility to use God's gifts in service to humanity.

**I Cor 2:1-13.** Hear God's Word on wisdom from the Apostle Paul: *"And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.*

For Paul the focus of our faith and worship in preaching, teaching, and gathering as a community of faith is in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. His sacrificial and caring love reveals the wisdom of God we as his disciples are expected to live in our relationships. Paul teaches the Corinthians that wisdom is insight and knowledge provided thru the Holy Spirit. As Christians we are called to model our behavior with one another in the love God gives us in Jesus. When we embrace this wisdom then like Jesus we will focus more on serving others than ourselves. We will see and reach out to people in need whom God calls us to love and serve. We will be enabled and equipped to fulfill our calling as people of faith. Then, Paul teaches, *(we will gain true wisdom by opening ourselves to receiving and living in the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand and apply the gifts He has bestowed on us.)* Paul had the faith and courage to take this message to Athens which was the Greek center of education and philosophy for the ancient world.

Paul is on a mission trip to Athens to educate the highly educated, which is not for the faint of heart. The Athenians are regarded as exemplars of philosophy, with a well-educated population also known for their lack of humility. Paul preaches the Gospel knowing he will face a demanding and potentially hostile crowd. Paul walks the talk of his faith risking injury or possibly worse. His calling, confidence, and courage are based on his faith that this is the will of Christ. One morning shortly after his arrival, the Holy Spirit leads Paul to the marketplace. He finds 140 statues, each on a raised marble base with an inscription naming its deity. He stops at one marble base without a statue and reads it is dedicated to the "unknown God." Many years ago I walked in Paul's footsteps through the marketplace of Athens and found this place of statues.

Later that day, Paul is given the wisdom of the Spirit and preaches to a crowd about God the Father of Jesus being their unknown God. He explains Christ died on the cross and was resurrected for our redemption and salvation by grace through faith. His resurrection proves God's power over sin and death gives life beyond earthly death. Paul teaches Spiritual Wisdom is received when we spread the Gospel by serving others in humility as Christ served humanity. This wisdom is hidden from some but given to the faithful by the Holy Spirit. The higher degrees of wisdom are given to those Paul calls spiritually mature. They have hearts and minds open to God's gifts of the Spirit and live them for the benefit of others. They do not claim power or position for personal benefit. Paul teaches when we

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live in the Spirit of Christian wisdom we will experience true peace and joy in our relationships with God and each other. The Athenians listen attentively and the reaction of the crowd to Paul's sermon is mixed. Some do not believe calling him a babbler, or one slightly deranged who speaks nonsense. Others accuse Paul of being drunk. But many are intrigued by his witness. They walk away saying in Jesus there is much to think about.

As a Hospice Chaplain and later as a Pastor, I have been fortunate to meet a number of spiritually wise Christians. I well remember one Hospice patient who was dying of cancer and confined to his bed. In the six weeks he is in resident care we become friends. We discuss many things including our families. One day I entered his room and started a conversation with him and his wife. Charley said: "*Tom, I enjoy our time together but Susan and I would like to meet your wife.*" Since Starann was a Hospice Volunteer I made the arrangements and they met while I was making rounds. Charlie and Susan later commented how much they enjoyed her visit. I did agree I am a most fortunate man! Then in a lighthearted moment I said to Charley, *I am happy Susan was present during Starann's visit so my interests were protected.* He grinned from ear to ear, as if to say, Tom, you are a mess!

In the time I minister to him and he to me, Charley is at peace as his life fades away. Charley dedicated most of his life as a counselor with habitual drug offenders, and those suffering from depression and mental illness. This is his calling. Being a counselor is his ministry and gift back to God. I see his deep faith and trust in the Lord and courage facing earthly death knowing without doubt eternal life awaits. I see in Charley a mature, spiritual wisdom. His gift to me is sharing what it means to live the True Wisdom of God, in this life, as preparation for the life to come.

A consistent theme of the Prophets of the Old Testament, of King Solomon in his wisdom literature of the Bible, and Jesus in his Gospel of Jesus Christ, is **True Wisdom Begins and Ends with God.** The Old Testament wisdom of living a Spiritual life, is given to us by God thru Jesus Christ, to serve people in all of life's situations. When we Live **True Christian Wisdom** we will be a blessing to others, and God will bless us and all who follow the way of Christ Jesus.

#### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Lord, open our hearts and minds to receive in Your Spirit the Wisdom that brings us light, gives us insight, and reveals your love for us in Christ Jesus. Be an ever-present voice within reminding us of our obligations to You and to all people. Give us the courage to use Your gifts of grace for the benefit of those in need in this community. In Christ Jesus' name we pray, Amen.