

## A Word to the Wise

A first question I would like us to consider this morning is this: Is it good to want to be wise? Is it good to want to be wise? I would suggest to you that the correct answer to this question is: "It depends." If you are wondering how that can be the right answer, I would remind you of Genesis 3:6; it says there: *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it."*

So, we are reminded here that the search for wisdom, particularly forbidden wisdom, was at the center of man's fall. It was the original sin that has been at the heart of man's estrangement from God ever since. What we need to understand is that not all "wisdoms" are created equal. There is godly wisdom and ungodly wisdom, wisdom that comes from God and wisdom of our own making. Godly wisdom brings life and peace; whereas, forbidden wisdom brings chaos and death.

But how can we tell the difference? The pre-worship thought in today's bulletin gets us off to the right start. Taken from Proverbs 9:10, it says: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* The problem with Eve and with Adam in the beginning was that they didn't fear God enough; they didn't have proper respect for His authority. And, because they didn't, and because they thought they could get away with it, they disobeyed His command. That disobedience cost them and us the loss of paradise and, ultimately, the loss of life.

The right kind of wisdom, however, is to be eagerly sought and highly cherished. Proverbs 4:7 says: *"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."* Proverbs 16:16 says, *"How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!"*

In our Scripture passage from I Kings 5, we discover that when we seek the right kind of wisdom with the right motives, God is highly pleased. I Kings 3:5-9, tells us:

*At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in*

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*heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.*

*"Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"*

We notice several things in this passage that tell us that Solomon was seeking the right kind of wisdom and for the right motives. First of all, that Solomon seek wisdom was initiated by God. God spoke to him in a dream and invited Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted. We notice then the attitude of Solomon as he responds to the invitation of God. He praises the Lord for His kindness to his father, David. Solomon honors the Lord and he obeys God's commandment to honor his earthly father.

Next, Solomon humbles himself before the Lord. He says, "I am only a child and do not know how to carry out my duties. In other words, Solomon doesn't presume to know it all; Solomon acknowledges that he needs help from the Lord.

Third, Solomon asks for the right motives. He asks for wisdom, or for a discerning heart, that he might govern God's people well. We notice too that he doesn't call the people his own people but God's people. Solomon sees himself as God's regent, always under God's authority as he exercises authority over God's people. Solomon prays for the right reason, for the right thing, in the right spirit and with the right motives. And, this is the kind of prayer God will always be happy to answer.

In fact, God is delighted by Solomon's request. I Kings 3:10-13 say:

*"The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, 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—both wealth and honor—so that in your*

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*lifetime you will have no equal among kings."*

The contrast between Eve and Solomon is clear. Eve wanted wisdom for herself to compete with God to make up her own rules regarding right and wrong. Solomon prayed for the wisdom to distinguish between right and wrong. There's a world of difference between the desire of Eve and the prayer of Solomon.

My 7 year old grandson, Aidan, is being brought up in the church and being parented to know the difference between right and wrong. But when it comes to making the right application of what he's being taught, he still needs to be taught some more. There is a wild, self-centered, streak in him that is still untamed.

I see it when we are playing any kind of a game or when we are having a splashing contest in the swimming pool. The question I always seem to be asking him is this: 'Who gave you the right to make up all the rules?' Aidan likes to make up his own game rules. Furthermore, what I notice is that Aidan's rules always favor Aidan and never Pappy or Grammy. And, not only does he like to make up his own rules, he also feels quite free to change those rules as a game progresses. If things aren't going the way he wants them to go, he changes the rules to see that they do.

All in all, one could hardly find a better definition of original sin, or any kind of sin, than that. Any time we decide to take matters into our own hands without regard to God, any time we decide to make up our own rules about how life in this world is to be lived, any time we attempt to get everyone else to live by our rules, we are treading on thin ice; we have exchanged wisdom for folly.

Authentic wisdom, Godly wisdom, always begins with the fear of the Lord—with a deep respect for God's authority. Godly wisdom is granting that it is God alone Who has the authority to make the rules that we live by; it is God alone who knows what is best for us and for the world. The Lord is our Creator so He knows how we are made and how our lives are to be lived for the greatest good. As Paul says in Romans 8, *"God works all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose."*

Thus, getting wisdom and getting our hearts and minds into

agreement with God are the same thing. As long as that is our ultimate aim and goal in life, we are on the road to true wisdom and on the road to life as life was meant to be. Take a moment to be still and to evaluate how you are doing here. Are you living to please God or are you seeking to please yourself? . . . How's that working out for you? Choosing to please God is wise because when we choose to please God, God is pleased with us. And, when God is pleased with us, He is pleased to heap His blessings upon us.

Look then at our Scripture reading from Matthew 7:24-29:

*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ‘And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.’ Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ‘The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.’”*

Again, wisdom is defined here as fearing God and bringing our lives into conformance with His will. The wise person respects God's authority so that when she hears (or reads) God's word, she listens and conforms her life to what she hears. When anyone builds their life on this foundation, they position themselves and their household to receive God's blessings.

This was the experience of Solomon in I Kings 3 and this was the experience of a Roman soldier named Cornelius in Acts 10. Notice what Luke tells us about Cornelius in Acts 10:2: *“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”*

Remember that **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” And, the fear of the Lord is also the beginning of blessing.**

The blessing for Cornelius begins to unfold in verse 3: *“One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius.’”* Here again we see a parallel with the experience of Solomon. God started the conversation. He showed up to Solomon in a dream and He showed up to Cornelius

in a vision. And, because both men had a proper fear of the Lord and respect for His authority and humbled themselves before the Lord, the Lord took the initiative to bless them.

In the case of Cornelius, God called Simon Peter to go to his home to tell him about Jesus. Acts 10:44-48 tell us:

*“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ‘Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”*

The blessings of Solomon and His kingdom began with his fear of the Lord. The salvation of Cornelius and his household began with Cornelius's fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord means that we acknowledge God's authority in our lives and humble ourselves before Him. The fear of the Lord means that we obey God's word when He speaks to us. The fear of the Lord means that we choose to build our lives and homes on the sure foundation of our Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all true wisdom. Luke 7:35 in the New Living Translation says, *“But wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it.”* The Lord challenges us to seek and surrender to His wisdom today and every day for the rest of our lives. All who trust and obey Him will be considered wise and the blessing of the Lord will rest upon them all the days of their lives.

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Sermon for July 30, 2017  
**A Word to the Wise**

***I Kings 3:5-13; Matthew 7:24-29  
Acts 10:1-6***

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