

## TRUTH AND WISDOM

**Proverbs 8:1, 4, 22-36** Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?... “To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.... “The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be. When there were no watery depths, I was given birth, when there were no springs overflowing with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind. “Now then, my children listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD. But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death.”

**1 Corinthians 1:18-31** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

**John 8:31-32** To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

## MESSAGE:

Someone once said that wisdom is superior to knowledge, because knowledge is information, but wisdom is understanding. Of course, according to our way of thinking, the way one gains wisdom is by acquiring knowledge. It seems to make sense: the more you know, the wiser you become.

But God looks at things differently: in His wisdom, God ordained that man would have remained wiser by knowing less. He commanded Adam and Eve to forego the knowledge of evil, but Adam and Eve ignored His command because they longed for the knowledge of evil. Once that knowledge entered the world it brought along with it death and all the miseries associated with death—disease and pain and suffering. The knowledge of evil turned paradise into a “vale of tears.” And that’s where you and I live: in a fallen world cursed by too much knowledge and not enough wisdom.

Adam and Eve’s sin was the sin of intellectual pride: the desire to know everything that God knows. In other words, to become equal to God. In secular terms, it is the belief that knowledge can solve all the problems that plague humanity. If we just accumulate enough information and impart it to enough people through education, we can build a better and better world. Intellectual pride is the conviction that our intellects are the sole gateways to wisdom and they should be allowed to operate without any restraints. If we want to get rid of war, famine, disease and poverty, the key is knowledge.

Originally, of course, our thirst for knowledge did come from God. God gave us inquiring minds which are capable of discovering and storing vast quantities of information. And so our urge to acquire knowledge has a divine origin: God made us that way. And so the problem is not with knowledge itself. The problem is that we don’t always use knowledge to good purpose.

In his classic satire, *Gulliver’s Travels*, Jonathan Swift depicts what happens when societies are ruled by people of intellect who have lost their moral and spiritual compass. The story concerns a man by the name of Lemuel Gulliver, who travels to various mythical countries in search of the perfect society. As it turns out, each country Gulliver visits is worse than the last, and by the end of the story, he has fallen into despair. He ends up a hopeless psychotic who lives in a barn and converses with horses.

The theme of Swift’s satire is that when the intellect comes to be untethered to a moral and spiritual foundation, the results are at best comical and at worst, horrific. One place Gulliver visits is a country called Laputa—the name is a combination of two Spanish words which mean “the prostitute.” Laputa is governed by people whose intellects have run amuck.

As Gulliver is led on a tour of their great university, the Academy of Lagado, he describes the various research projects that are being conducted. One scientist is attempting to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, which he plans to seal in jars and sell to people to warm themselves when the weather is cold. An architect has contrived a new method of building houses by beginning with the roof and working downward to the foundation after the manner of spiders and bees. A blind scientist is trying to discover a way to identify

colors by their smell and feel. An agricultural engineer has devised a new way to plow fields: he buries acorns, dates and chestnuts eight inches under the surface of the ground and then turns six hundred hogs loose to root up the goodies, thus preparing the ground for planting.

We laugh at the preposterous antics of the scientists of Laputa, yet they are not as far removed from reality as you might think. Nor are the results of intellectual activity which has shed the restraints of moral and spiritual considerations always funny. For example, between 1900 and 1940, a theory emerged which gained widespread acceptance among the intelligentsia in America and Europe. It was called the theory of eugenics.

The theory of eugenics proposed that there was a crisis in the human gene pool which was leading to a deterioration of the human race. The best human beings were not breeding as rapidly as the inferior ones, who were defined as “foreigners, immigrants, Jews, degenerates, the unfit and the feeble-minded.” This group was referred to by eugenicists as “dangerous human pests” and “a rising tide of imbeciles” who were polluting the human race. Sounds crazy? Supporters of the theory included Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

When it was challenged in court, Supreme Court Justices Oliver Wendel Holmes and Louis Brandeis ruled in its favor. Enthusiasts included Alexander Graham Bell, Margaret Sanger (the founder of Planned Parenthood), Leland Stanford—the founder of Stanford University, the novelist H. G. Wells and the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw.

Eugenics research was carried out at Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Johns Hopkins Universities—funded by the Carnegie Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. Legislation to address the so-called “eugenics crisis” was passed in states from California to New York, with the full support of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Medical Association and the National Research Council. Even some pastors of liberal, mainline churches declared from the pulpit that if Jesus were alive, he would support the principles of eugenics. In Europe, strategies were proposed and adopted to discourage or even prevent “inferior human beings” from reproducing. These strategies to bring about the elimination of undesirables, culminated in the Holocaust, where the principles of eugenics were invoked to justify the murder of over six million Jews.

After the war, when the horrors of the Holocaust came to be known, nobody would admit to ever having subscribed to the theory of eugenics, but while the intellectual fad lasted, not one prominent scientific voice was raised in protest.

The human intellect is a gift, and like all gifts, it is not immune to corruption. Man is an observant, reasoning creature—which is to say that man is by nature scientific. We yearn to understand the world around us and to put that understanding to work. The human intellect is one of God’s greatest gifts to mankind. But when we begin to worship the gift rather than the Giver of the gift, we become idolaters—and idols ALWAYS turn and devour those who worship them. God gave us intellects so that we might follow Him in faith and serve our neighbor in love—not so that we might feed our vanity by attempting to make ourselves equal to Him.

Even Paul was susceptible to intellectual pride. On one occasion, Paul decided to use his intellect rather than his personal testimony to bring people to Christ. He preached a sermon to the Athenians, in the course of which he paraded his knowledge of their literature and philosophy and history. Knowing their admiration for the intellect, he hoped to persuade them by the brilliance of his argument. Things seemed to go well up to the point when he asserted that God had raised Christ from the dead. At that point, many of those listening to him began to sneer, having concluded that Paul was no intellectual because he had asked them to believe something that everybody knew was impossible: that the dead could be raised to new life. Confident in their intellectual superiority, they rejected the message of salvation.

Paul immediately departed for Corinth, and later he wrote of his arrival there: *“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior 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...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 men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”* Oh how these words apply to our age!

In our time we are beset by two massive illusions. The first is that the solutions to the social and economic problems facing us in America lie in the sphere of politics and political action. It is not that politics and political action are not important or worthy of our attention and careful consideration. In a republic like ours it is vitally important to have a politically informed electorate. The problem is that our politics have become completely secularized and untethered to moral and spiritual wisdom.

There was a time when our leaders were not afraid to invoke religious and moral principles as the basis for their political convictions. In Abraham Lincoln’s acceptance speech for the Republican nomination for president in 1858, he proclaimed his commitment to preserve the union in words of Jesus Christ: “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Over half of the words and thoughts in his 2<sup>nd</sup> inaugural address are taken directly from the Bible. Even Thomas Jefferson, though he was not himself a Christian, penned the following words which are inscribed on the Jefferson memorial in Washington, D.C.: “God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and his justice will not sleep forever. Commerce between master and slave is despotism.”

When is the last time you heard one of our political leaders describe liberty or justice as gifts from God? Or quote the Bible in a public address? Divorced from a spiritual and moral basis, our political climate has become almost mindlessly tribalistic. We have become a house divided, and a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Our second massive illusion is “scientism”—the idea that all of man’s problems can be solved by science. We have discovered so much, especially in the past century and a half, that we’ve come to believe that there are no limits to the benefits science can produce for us. But there is one thing that science cannot do and it’s the most important

thing of all: science cannot save us from our sinfulness. Only God can do that, and only God does it. And he doesn't do it through our intellects or our emotions or our power of reason: he does it by creating faith in our hearts in the Savior of mankind.

Faith opens our eyes and ears and minds to God's wisdom, and God's wisdom surpasses our intellects as far as the heavens surpass the earth. As God says in *Isaiah 55:8-9*: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*"

And God's wisdom is not a body of knowledge or a philosophical system. God's Wisdom is not a "what" at all—it is a WHO. God's Wisdom is His Son, Jesus Christ, who calls out to each one of us, saying: "*Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord.*" Blessed are all those who hearken to the wisdom of God.

Amen