

The Wise Walk with the Wise

Proverbs 13:20; Psalm 1:1-2

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It has been said that you can tell what a person is like and what he will become by the company he chooses to keep.

For example, those who choose to spend their time in fellowship and communion with the ungodly will most likely learn their sinful habits, their unclean speech, and their lustful desires. Not only is this true in a general sense, but it is even true of those who have genuinely embraced the Lord their God with a saving faith. Consider the effect the ungodly inhabitants of Sodom had on Lot, the nephew of Abraham, who is called a righteous man in 2 Peter 2:7-8. Having chosen to live in that notoriously wicked city, Lot had to be literally forced by the two angels to leave the city before the Lord destroyed it. Tragically, his association with Sodom led even his wife and children into a love with that wicked city (his wife was turned into a pillar of salt as she looked back with fondness to see the destruction of Sodom). There is etched forever into our minds the judgment that befalls those whose heart desires and chooses to keep company with the wicked. It is a downward spiral that leads to severe discipline or destruction from the Lord.

To the contrary, we are taught by the Spirit of God in the First Psalm what our attitude and behavior ought to be in regard to those who oppose the commandments of our Lord (Psalm 1:1-2). The man who enjoys the blessedness of the Lord does not go from bad to worse by walking and imitating the wicked habits of the ungodly, and then standing in the paths with those who willfully violate the commandments of God, and finally sitting in the seat of those who blaspheme the Lord, teaching others to do the same. To imitate the wicked in our desires, speech, and conduct will set us on the path to becoming like them until there is little or no difference between the children of God and the children of the devil.

How and in what ways are you fellowshiping and communing with the wicked and the ungodly? It may not be a conscious decision on your part to be like them (as it was not a conscious decision on Lot's part to be like the Sodomites). However, if you do not continually evaluate those with whom you are choosing to spend your time, you may ever so gradually be walking, standing, and sitting with the ungodly in your thoughts and desires, or in your words and expressions you use in your speech, or in your behavior and conduct. May God direct us to take careful inventory of our lives this Lord's Day to the glory of Christ who saved us from all such ungodliness.

Do you want to be a wise man or a fool? God says whether you are wise or foolish will to a large degree be determined by those with whom you choose to spend your time. The main points from our text this Lord's Day are: (1) If You Walk with the Wise, You Will Be Wise (Proverbs 13:20a); (2) If You Walk with Fools, You Will Be Destroyed (Proverbs 13:20b).

I. If You Walk with the Wise, You Will Become Wise (Proverbs 13:20a).

A. Let us first determine what it is to be wise.

1. What Biblical Wisdom Is Not.

a. Wisdom is not the mere mental acquisition of biblical knowledge and truth.

Wisdom is not merely cramming your head full of knowledge so that you are able to answer difficult doctrinal questions. Knowledge of the truth may either humble a man or puff up a man in pride. Knowledge of the truth may be used to make a man holy or used to make a man haughty. Now I do not mean to disparage or disregard knowledge of the truth at all, for biblical knowledge certainly is the foundation upon which biblical

wisdom is built. Knowledge is the root of wisdom, whereas wisdom is the fruit of knowledge. Dear ones, if the infallible truth of God as revealed through Christ our Savior is not the Rock upon which you build your life in this world, you will be left to the shifting and fallible thoughts and opinions of men upon which to build your life and will be destroyed just as the man who built his house upon the sand. What you believe to be true will certainly shape and mold how you live (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

b. If, for example, you believe that man is inherently good rather than (as God teaches in the Bible) inherently sinful, you will not look to Christ as one who suffered the infinite wrath of God to satisfy divine justice for condemned sinners, but will rather look to Christ as a mere example of love after whom you are to pattern your life. Carefully note the importance of knowledge of the truth in this regard.

(1) It is absolutely essential that you know and understand that everyone stands condemned before a holy God due to sin and that without a Savior, you shall all spend eternity in hell.

(2) It is absolutely necessary that you know that Jesus Christ came to rescue all sinners who will turn from looking to their own works of righteousness and look in faith to Christ and His perfect righteousness as their only hope of eternal salvation.

(3) What you believe about God, Christ, sin, and salvation is necessary if you would have everlasting life. But to know these truths and yet to refuse to receive Jesus Christ by faith is tantamount to setting food before a starving man who refuses to eat and live. Thus, he perishes because he will not eat. Herein is illustrated the importance of not only knowing the truth, but applying the truth—not only knowing who Christ is, but receiving by faith the Christ that is offered in the gospel. That is wisdom—the application of what you know to be true.

2. What Biblical Wisdom Is.

a. Biblical Wisdom is a grace (nothing which we earn or deserve, but a free gift from God) bestowed upon all those who embrace Jesus Christ by faith alone, and it is the application of the knowledge of the truth rather than the mere acquisition of the knowledge of the truth. For Jesus Christ is not only the truth of God who illuminates your mind as to what you are to believe, but He is also the wisdom of God who teaches you how you are to please Him in every area of your life (Colossians 2:3). Therefore, to be in union and communion with Jesus Christ is to be in union and communion with true wisdom. For Christ and His wisdom are inseparable one from the other.

b. For example, if you believe that God cannot lie and is ever faithful to His own Word, you will be wise in applying that truth by seeking to be faithful and honorable to all lawful covenants and promises you have made with your spouse, your employer, your church, and your God.

c. If you believe that God knows all and sees all, you will be wise by realizing how foolish it is to pretend as if God does not see the sins you commit in secret. To think and act as if no one knows the sins you have committed in secret is to be foolish rather than wise. For you have not applied to your life the truth you have affirmed with your mouth.

B. How Does Wisdom Increase In Your Life?

1. By studying and filling your mind with the Word of God so that you know what you are to believe to be true (2 Timothy 3:16).

2. By praying for wisdom in trials you face and decisions you must make (James 1:5-6).

3. By loving wisdom and seeking it above any pleasure or treasure upon the earth (Proverbs 3:13-18).

4. By spending time with those who are wise (Proverbs 13:20). Solomon declares that those who would sincerely desire to increase in biblical wisdom (i.e. to grow in their ability to apply the truth of Christ more and more to their lives and to the lives of others), must prefer to spend time with those who are wise rather than with those who are foolish.

a. A word of caution at this point is in order. Do not go around trying to identify

those in the congregation who are wise and those who are fools on the basis of:

- (1) How long they have been a Christian.
- (2) How much they seem to know.
- (3) How zealous and enthusiastic they seem to be about the things of God.
- (4) How many conspicuous spiritual gifts they appear to have or don't have.
- (5) How popular they are or how well they are liked.

b. For it is possible that one may be wise in many ways and yet be a fairly recent convert who knows relatively little compared to others in the church, but is growing in knowledge and endeavoring to apply all that he is learning to his life. In other words, you should not necessarily see a new Christian as foolish simply because he has recently come to receive Christ by faith. In fact, one who professes to have been a Christian for many years and claims to have much theological knowledge may be foolish because he is not endeavoring to apply to his life what he says he knows (he is not practicing what he preaches).

c. Again it is possible that those who are very zealous for God may have a zeal, but not according to knowledge.

d. They may be very gifted communicators, who have photographic memory. They may have a winsome personality, but may be foolish rather than wise because they devote little or no time and do not take seriously the importance of applying God's truth to their own lives, to their own families, to their work, to their recreation, to their own pleasures, or to their own appearance. The Word of God is good for everyone else to hear and apply to their lives, but it is not penetrating the thick veneer of their own soul.

e. Whereas those who are truly wise may quietly get the job done behind the scenes in helping and encouraging others (i.e. they have no great conspicuous gifts and abilities). You may find those who are wise not talking the most or talking the loudest about theology, but listening more, reflecting more, learning more, and quietly applying what they learn to every area of their life.

f. What I am trying to communicate is this: Those who are wise are not wise necessarily because of the gifts they possess, but because of the grace they possess to use what they have for the glory of Christ and the profit of others. Even if they have only been given 1 talent by the Lord, they do not hide and bury it, but rather use it and apply it in order to make the name of Jesus great rather than their own name great. The wise man uses the knowledge, graces, and gifts of God. The foolish man abuses, misuses, or buries the knowledge, graces, and gifts of God.

C. If you would be truly wise, consciously seek to spend time with those who are wise in not wasting, but in redeeming the time, talents, and treasures given to them by God.

1. The three young men (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego) were wise (not because of their maturity in years), but because they would not bow before the image of Nebuchadnezzar (even if it meant being cast into a fiery furnace).

2. They were applying the truth of God to their particular situation. Their knowledge of God was not separate and distinct from their actions. They did not divide their life into categories such as: Our faith in Christ is only useful and to be applied on the Sabbath or when we are around other believers.

D. Do you desire to spend your time with those who are wise—those who have an appetite for Christ, who yearn to know more of Him, and who seek to use their knowledge, gifts, and graces to glorify Him? God says, if these are the people with whom you want to spend time, whom you desire to observe, whom you go to in order to seek advice, then you, yourself, will become like them. You, too, will become wise (Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 6:11-12).

1. You not only need to spend time with those who are wise and presently living, but you also need to spend time with those who were wise in their time but have since gone to be with the Lord. Read

and reflect upon the great wisdom and courage of the martyrs and witnesses of Christ. Read not only their challenging theological works, but read their practical sermons and lectures where they apply God's truth to your life. Make Luther, Calvin, Knox, Rutherford, Gillespie, Cameron, Renwick, and many others your wise companions with whom you voluntarily choose to spend time in order to learn from them.

2. Remember that it is not mere men to whom you look in order to be wise, but it is Jesus Christ in the Word, and Jesus Christ in the lives of the wise to whom you listen. You are not followers of men. You do not listen to men simply because they hold a place of authority in the church. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me." You desire to be with those who are wise only because they evidence the wisdom of Jesus Christ in their attitudes, desires, goals, words, and actions. You desire the Lord Jesus in them.

II. If You Walk with Fools, You Will Be Destroyed (Proverbs 13:20b).

A. Just as we considered what wisdom is, let us spend a minute identifying what foolishness is.

1. Foolishness is arrogance and pride where knowledge is used to promote how much you know and to communicate that to others.

2. Foolishness is obstinacy where you refuse to be enlightened by the Spirit of God in hearing and receiving the truth of God.

3. Foolishness is self-centeredness where you must do things your way rather than God's way.

4. Foolishness is receiving the knowledge of the truth, but not using it and applying it in your life.

5. Foolishness is listening to man rather than listening to Christ as revealed in Scripture.

B. Solomon says those who are foolish in the ways just mentioned, desire to spend their time with those who are like them—foolish. They do not really want to commune with and learn from those who are wise because it rubs them the wrong way (that's a code phrase for "I don't like what they have to say"). For the foolish man is broad in his acceptance and toleration of whatever man may propose. Whereas the wise man is narrow-minded in that he desires to be directed by what God declares to be true, right, pure, and holy.

C. When Solomon speaks of the "companion" of fools, the Hebrew word for "companion" comes from a word which means to feed. Thus, companions were those in the Hebrew mind with whom one would spend time eating and communing around a dinner table.

1. Paul says there are even professing Christians with whom you should not eat and commune because they are obstinate in their sins and errors (1 Corinthians 5:11). So even when professing Christians are obstinate in their foolishness, you should not desire to be their companions (and pretend as if nothing is wrong), lest you learn from them and become like them (a little leaven leavens the whole loaf).

2. However, you may always spend time with unbelievers and with wayward Christians if they are open to the truth and desire to hear the truth. Christ was called a friend of sinners. He met with the ungodly, with the crooked tax collectors, with the harlots, and with even self-righteous Pharisees—not to commune with them in their sin, but in order to lead them out of their sin and to bring them by knowledge of the truth to saving faith in Christ. So might you do as well. Choose where you will spend time with such sinners well. Don't spend time with those of the opposite sex in private, isolated places. Don't go into their dens of iniquity, lest you be drawn into their sinful practices. Don't compromise the truth in order to build a relationship. For, dear ones, it is not you that saves a single soul. It is God alone that saves souls from sin. And He will do so by means of the truth coming from a heart filled with love for the lost.

D. Those that choose to spend time with fools will not only become like them, but Solomon says, they will be destroyed—destroyed in body (in various ways in this life as they are led to abuse themselves),

but most importantly destroyed in body and soul in hell.

E. With such consequences at stake, it behooves you to weigh so carefully such questions as these. With whom do you desire to spend your time? Who do you want to be like? Who are your heroes? To whom do you look up? The answer to those questions can easily be determined. How many hours in the course of the week do you spend in wanting to be like certain movie stars or rock singers or TV personalities or sports figures? For you are communing with them in their music, in their movies, in your thoughts and desires, even if you have never personally met them. Do you want to be like them or are they “cool” because they are wise like Christ? Are you attracted to people because of their gifts or because of their wisdom? Because they are famous and good-looking or because they are wise? Dear ones, if you would be wise, commune with those who are wise, for the companion of fools will be destroyed.

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