

Wisdom

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[0 : 0 0] So, wisdom, 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 8, the last section that we're looking at which has been listed, the gifts of the Spirit.

It tells us that there are a variety of gifts with the same Spirit, we've seen that before, and then it goes on to say, for to one is given the Spirit of utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to that same Spirit.

So we're going to look at kind of broadly for a little while wisdom, and then we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. And okay, I'm going to be apologizing as well because the introduction is kind of similar to this morning, not deliberately, but it's just looking at where we are in the world in which we're living in, where we see these shadows of truth, but they're torn from God who's the giver, an empty of balance and grace filled sense.

Because we've got these tension within the world in which we live, within the secular worldview, we were kind of looking a little bit at the meta-narrative this morning, where the worldview that we see around us is interesting because there's a relentless individuality within that, a philosophy.

Now come back, don't forget that word, philosophy. I'm going to come back to that word because it's linked to wisdom, okay? There's this great individualistic philosophy, if it's good for me, if it fits in with my thinking, if it suits my character, I've got to be true to myself if it feels right, then we speak about our rights and our identity and our understanding.

[1 : 4 7] It's kind of like we live in a bespoke society. Everything is bespoke for us, for the individual, and that's a very powerful philosophical foundation of the world in which we live.

But interestingly, now, and this is the second word I want you to remember, is sophistication, because it's also linked to wisdom. So there's philosophy, you might have got the link already, sophistication, okay?

The sophistication of group think, so the world in which we live is very individual, but also there's a real group think within the world we live in, so that people are discredited sometimes from having different views from the spirit, from the mood of the day and generation we live in.

The current zeitgeist, as my friend David Robertson always likes to use that word. In other words, what's culturally acceptable.

So there's an individuality, but there's also a real sense of commonality that's not that individual at all. We're being processed towards thinking and believing and acting in a certain way as a group about sexuality, about identity, about morality, about the ethics of life, particularly the ethics of life before birth and towards the end of life.

[3 : 1 2] So there's a powerful politic of identity which is contra-individual. It's very group think, and that's really paradoxical, isn't it?

There's these two extremes in the society in which we live. For example, it does beg the question, if you've been listening to or watching the news over this last couple of weeks, whose individuality is it?

Whose commonality is it? Whose rights? Who decides, for example, in the riots that we've been seeing in France and Paris over these last few days?

Whose rights are to be defended? Is it the French government? Is it those in fuel poverty? Is it the anarchists? Is it the police? Is it the yellow vests?

Now what's really interesting about this is that the yellow vests, there's a commonality, isn't it? They're all wearing the yellow vests, but nobody knows who they are.

[4 : 15] There's a great individual, there's no spokesperson, there's no group that they stand for, so there's a mixture of total individuality within this commonality, but it does, it is extreme and it is leading to extreme ways of action and thinking.

Because what we find is that God's way, and this by way of introduction, God's way of wisdom is different. There's the balance that God has in the wisdom that He reveals in His Word, which is that there is individuality, but as we've seen in all our studies for the gifts of the Spirit, there is individuality but for the common good.

So there's a very strong sense of community and of the common good. We are individually unique and special before God, and we've seen, and we saw this morning by nature we're estranged, and yet grace is what brings us back.

And it is as we come to a personal faith in Him, an individual faith in Him that we are redeemed and renewed. But we're never just saved as individuals, we're saved towards one another.

We're saved towards God and also towards one another, to live in gospel community, to live in fellowship with Him, to live committed to one another. So there is individuality in God's wisdom and there is commonality, but it's tremendously uniquely revealed by God, a grace-filled, counter-cultural society which balances both the individual and the group together, transformed by grace.

[6 : 00] So we see that in God's wisdom, and we recognize that wisdom from God is something that God partners with us towards.

So God's wisdom is something that He gifts, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. When we become Christians, we're gifted different qualities, different individual qualities, and one of them is wisdom as we've seen in all our different gifts of the Spirit.

And God partners with us so that we are able to become... It's really great, isn't it, to be able to do something with someone who's an expert. You know, you're hacking away at something on your own, maybe a DIY job I would be thinking about, and then someone who's an expert comes along and makes it so easy, and you learn so much from them.

Well, it's a really poor example, but that is true with all the gifts, the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit which He gives us for the common good. He partners with us, He gifts us His own Holy Spirit to enable us to recognize wisdom, and He partners with us in wisdom.

So the wisdom of God isn't primarily our self-motivated abilities or intellect or natural abilities, but we gain His wisdom, independence on Him and in reliance on Him.

[7 : 26] It's kind of like we run a three-legged race with God every day. We've got to run a race in coordination with Him, in step with Him, in step with the Spirit.

He binds Himself to us, and we're able to walk in step with the Spirit. It's a kind of three-legged run with Him. So He partners with us, and He gifts us His wisdom, and it's a wisdom that He seeks for us to share with others.

So that's really just a short time that I'm going to focus on that. The wisdom that He speaks of here in chapter 12 is a wisdom that is a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom that is a word that's spoken, it's always shared, isn't it?

We always share something. When we're sharing a word, we're sharing it with someone else, and it comes from a wise life. So the word wisdom is Sophia, okay?

The word that is used here. And that's where we get the words we looked at at the beginning, philosophy. Philosophy is philo, the love of wisdom.

[8 : 33] So philosophy is the love of wisdom. And then we looked at the word sophistication, Sophia again, which just simply means the art of using wisdom.

If someone's sophisticated, it's because they live out a life allegedly of wisdom. Sometimes it's used in the wrong way.

So what's God's Sophia? What's God's wisdom that He speaks of here, or that's spoken of in the Bible? Well, the first thing, ironically, is the cross.

The cross is the very heart of God's wisdom. And we don't have time to read 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, but if you do have time to go and read them, these two chapters explain very clearly that the cross of Jesus Christ is the wisdom and the power of God.

It is the focus of where His wisdom lies. It's where theology and faith come together to reveal His wisdom. And that's strange, that a crucified Savior is the very heart of understanding life, understanding who we are and what we should be and what we should do.

[9 : 55] The cross is because it's the basis of our understanding of our human condition and the determination of God and the grace of God to reach out and redeem us and promise us radical transformation.

So if you're looking for wisdom in life, that's where we begin. It's very different from anything else. He says, God's foolish, he says, wiser than men's wisdom, but he says, I preach Christ and Christ crucified.

It's the wisdom of God and the power of God. Read these first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, and it's where it all begins for us. That's why this evening, the Lord suppers, it's a sacrament He's given us.

He doesn't give us a sacrament primarily about His birth, however utterly important and significant it is, nor His 33 years of life. He gives us a sacrament which remembers His death and what it speaks of, the resurrection and all that goes with that.

The cross is the center. So you want wisdom, you find it, you'll find it there. That's what it begins. It begins with us living our lives at the foot of the cross and understanding who we are in the light of the cross and what the amazing commitment of Jesus to us because of what He has done, dying in our place.

[11 : 15] Greater love is no man than this. He laid down his life for his friends. Now, in saying that that is the core and heart of wisdom, it's not being anti-intellectual, I know you all think I'm anti-intellectual, but I'm not.

I don't like reading that much, but I'm not anti-intellectual. But it's the submitting of our intellect, not the idolizing of our intellect.

1 Corinthians 2 verses 1 and 2 summarizes that, have we got that on the screen? When I came to you, brothers, Paul says there, I didn't come proclaiming to the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom as it were, intellect, but I declared to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

So it's pitting it against worldly wisdom. And then in Matthew 11, 25, Jesus says a rather remarkable thing. He says, at that time Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to children.

So it's not anti-intellectual, but it's recognizing the place of the intellect and recognizing that learnedness comes from submitting our brains and our intellects and our knowledge to Jesus Christ and to His Lordship over all that we are and our emptiness and our need without them, that we can't find meaning and we can't find salvation and eternal life without Him.

- [12 : 53] God's wisdom does involve our brains and does involve us thinking, but it's much more than the mere pursuit of knowledge. It's recognizing that the cross is the foundation and the central to that.

So the cross is the first thing that is a revelation of God's wisdom. The second thing is from Proverbs 9 verse 10, which many of you may know, the fear of the Lord.

That's the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. So again, we're finding that God's wisdom, this gift that He gives us by the Holy Spirit, is firstly that we ground our lives at the cross, but then that we understand that worship, awe, reverence of God through faith in Jesus Christ is the key to wisdom.

So faith and trust. Grace is testimony this morning. The fear of the Lord, the worship of the Lord, the trusting in the Lord, that's the beginning of wisdom for us as we are reborn into worship and saving faith.

Beginning to see things, therefore, from God's perspective. So you'll go from here today and you've got all kinds of difficulties and troubles and trials and problems in your lives, suffering.

- [14 : 03] And rather than seeing these things as evidence of God's dislike towards you or disinterest in you, we see them by faith differently. We see God's love through them.

We see the temporary nature of the suffering. We see the carrying of a cross in His name. We see everything, suffering, society, pleasure, the church, family, relationships, money, everything we see differently because Christ as Lord, Savior and Lord is at the very heart of who we are.

So the feet of the cross and the feet of the Lord. And when these things are in place in our lives as we seek them to be, then we find that the gift of wisdom is something that we live and that we speak.

So we live wisdom and we speak wisdom. The gift here particularly is spoken of as the utterance of wisdom. I think that's very significant and important.

But Israel read from James chapter 3 and it's a great chapter and it speaks all about wisdom.

- [15 : 19] So God's revelation, God's knowledge, God's word, God's character, God's cross, God's fear, God's word gives us the principles and the foundation of wisdom.

And His word gives us the grounding to make decisions where there's nothing black and white stated in the Bible. Lots of things are not black and white in the Bible.

The job that you're going to go for, the person that you're going to marry, the color of the new car you're going to get, well, some of that doesn't matter. But the Bible doesn't say things, lots of things. How we spend our money, well, let's say some things about that.

But there's many things that are only principally given to us, not black and white. He wants us to live by wisdom. We did a series on Proverbs last year, didn't we, which gives us an indication of His way.

And as we soak that into our experience, then we begin to understand that many of the decisions we make are decisions about wisdom. They're not black and white. They're about knowing God and knowing God's mind and heart as a general direction of life.

- [16 : 32] And as we do so, we're encouraged to speak that wisdom into the lives of others. As we live it, we speak it. Now, we're really bad at that, especially as Scots men and women.

We like privacy. We like to do things on our own. We don't like to be challenged. We don't like to be encouraged necessarily in spiritual matters. It's all very private.

But true wisdom is the uttered and is a gift of God as we live out that life and share it with others. It's still believed from the heart, okay? Psalms 3, verses 14 to 18, it's not the wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly and spirit.

That is bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, boasting being false. Jealousy, selfish ambition. It's never merely philosophy or sophistication.

So you can be a great philosopher. You can be very sophisticated. But there's this great need to root out envy and bitterness and pride and selfish ambition and we are to reveal from a transformed heart the wisdom that comes from above, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, good fruits, impartial and sincere.

[17 : 57] So we live that in our lives when we are close to Jesus Christ, grace and goodness.

A peaceable way of living with others so that we are sharing truth and sharing wisdom but not in a divisive way, not in a separatist way, not in a judgmental way.

We're wise and that we're open to reason. It's not a great description or characteristic of wisdom that we're open to reason. That means that we listen. I said, great, the Christians are really bad at listening.

Christians just want to preach. And ministers especially just want to preach. But it's very important that we listen, that we're open to reason, that we talk back and forth with people, that we recognize that there are others maybe right in different areas and that even in the criticisms we receive there's usually an element of truth.

We walk in the shoes of another person before we deign to give them our wisdom. That we're open to reason. That we're full of mercy. That is quick to forgive, quick to persevere, full of good fruits, impartial and sincere.

[19 : 12] So it's lived from the heart. The wisdom that's spoken of in James here, it's from our heart out, comes from our walk with God, with Jesus Christ, understanding who He is, the cross and the fear of the Lord.

But it is shared into the gospel, the Christian community. Uttered wisdom, wisdom spoken. It's not just this kind of... How would you describe it?

It's not just this look, this kind of... Yeah, just... It's not a demeanor.

It's not just that we come across as terribly wise in how we live, but it is something that we share. Now, I believe that preaching, and some argue that the context in 1 Corinthians with regard to these speaking gifts refers to preaching, that preaching should be wise, not only in interpreting the Scripture and teaching it, but also in applying it.

There's an argument about that in some circles about preaching methods and models, whether preaching should just teach what's in the Bible or should begin to apply it. Well, surely if we are sharing wisdom, wisdom is the sophistication, it's the knowledge of the use of God's wisdom and the application of it, that's important in preaching for the pastor teacher.

[20 : 39] But as broader implications for all of us in our Christian lives, you encourage your fellow Christian, encourage your husband and wife, encourage your friend in holiness, share wisdom into their lives, not preaching at them, involving that listening and compassion and respect, but speaking wisdom, God's wisdom into their lives, pulling them back from the edge of disaster, helping them, saying we'll pray for them.

All of these things is the wisdom, the commitment of living out our Christian life, the fear of the knowledge of God with one another, because it brings a harvest of righteousness.

James says here, that's what we're to do. It's not simply being an isolate wisdom person, not simply soaking up knowledge for ourselves, but it's having that way of living in order to share the wisdom with others.

So in conclusion, in St. Columbus, we're looking for the preachers and the elders and the teachers to live wisdom, to be well founded, focused on the cross and the fear of the Lord and the wisdom and knowledge of God's Word in their lives and as they lead the congregation.

We're looking for that in me and Thomas and the elders and the deacons, the women's pastoral team, everyone that is part of the church at that level, but also all of us hungry for wisdom, God's wisdom, God's gift of wisdom and sharing that.

[22 : 22] We want to be these people, as a people who are hungry for the righteousness and the wisdom associated and you know the great thing?

It doesn't matter about your IQ. It doesn't matter if you've got a university degree or not. It simply is unrelated because God says if you don't have, because you don't ask.

It's a gift that we can ask for. It's God's gift. It does involve our brains, but it's much greater than that and it's a gift that He gives us.

And I want us here to be these people who pray for that gift, but also people who seek out others who have a special gift of wisdom, because we've seen that in all the gifts of the Spirit, that not everyone has to the same degree and in the same measure these gifts.

Ask, pray for it, seek it out. You know, we're developing a whole structure of discipleship and that's really, it's just Sophia.

[23 : 29] It's just wisdom. It's seeking to live and help us to live in wisdom and be accountable to one another and share that wisdom. So I ask the older Christians here, particularly, share your wisdom.

Don't be shy and maybe share, maybe particularly older Christians, not necessarily in age, but who've been Christians for a long time, share your wisdom. You have a responsibility to share it with younger Christians.

Share your wisdom. Share the wisdom that God gives you. And you have a responsibility to live well and, dare I say, finish well. I think sometimes as older Christians we can get in a rut and not really develop and not really grow but we're just kind of moseying on till our dying day.

And we've given up in a sense. Can I ask you to finish well? Seeking more and more wisdom and sharing that wisdom with this great younger generation here.

And the younger people here, can I say, seek out that wisdom. Seek out your older brother and sister in Christ. Learn, be accountable, take a little bit of discipline now and again when maybe our foolishness and our failings are exposed and confess our sins to one another.

[24 : 54] And it comes in that context of community, relationship, respect, love and sacrificial commitment to one another. Wisdom of God's balance of being individuals within His community.

He places us in community because we need that. We need it. And that's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

We don't do it on our own because it matters that we're together. So we're going to do that. And please spend a few moments as we think about the Lord's work for us, that we consider His wisdom and pray for His wisdom which He promises to us and seek to live it in community and in our own hearts.

Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that You would bless us tonight. Bless us as we gather together. We thank You for worship. We thank You for commonality.

We thank You for individuality. We thank You for Your wisdom. Thank You that it is utterly counter-cultural in its root being the cross and the fear of the Lord.

[26 : 09] And we pray that we would find that great balance in our lives and that we would seek the tremendous character of Jesus and the wisdom of Jesus as we move forward.

Help us to forgive many and be quick to forgive and slow to judge. And as we share and celebrate and are united together at the Lord's table, may it be that we're not just united in word or outwardly but with a real sacrificial commitment to Your body, the local church of which we belong.

So bless us, we pray, and go before us in Jesus' name. Amen.