

More Precious than Gold

*How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding.
For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold.
She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. (Proverbs 3:13-15)*

Was the author of these words simply using figurative language to extol the virtues of wisdom or did he intend for us to take them literally? For years, I thought that passages like this were merely extolling the virtues of wisdom. I thought that passages like these were intended to convey a general spiritual truth using figurative language.

Recently, as He has done on many occasions, God placed me in a situation that demands true wisdom and humility. More than ever before, I realize that I have absolutely no power to produce it. In reality, it has always been this way but now, more than ever, I realize that I am and always have been completely unable to change my heart. I could try to act wise and put on humility, but I cannot actually produce wisdom and humility within me. There is and always has been only One who has this power, the Almighty God.

It is because of this truth that we understand why true wisdom is literally more precious than all the riches of the world. If I set my mind to work with my hands, I can expect to receive some type of monetary reward for my labor. In other words, through effort, I can acquire some degree of worldly riches. But wisdom cannot be gained any other way except as a gift from God. He is THE ONLY SOURCE of it. Fools can acquire great worldly riches and be void of wisdom. Therefore, wisdom is literally more precious than gold and jewels. According to the Bible, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). So, if a man fears the Lord, he is wealthier than any unbeliever even if that unbeliever possesses billions of dollars. The man who fears the Lord has something that the rich fool does not possess and could never acquire with all his riches. Even if he set his mind to work for it and try with all his might to be wise, he could never generate true wisdom and humility.

What is true wisdom and humility? What does it look like? It looks like Jesus. God has made clear that I need to be more like Jesus in how I treat people, starting with those closest to me. But how does this come about? Can I just decide to be more humble and wise? Though I can and should humble myself and walk wisely, I cannot actually produce true humility and wisdom within me. Only God can. But I have great reason to believe that He is able and willing to do this because according to the Bible, He predestined me to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). While this will ultimately be brought about in the resurrection, God has begun to do this through the process of sanctification. I can't change me but God can and is indeed doing this very thing. Is there anything I can do or is it completely up to God? The answer is yes. Yes, there is something I can do and yes, it is completely up to God. Because it is completely up to God, I can pray. Jesus said, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened"* (Matthew 7:7-8). James said, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him"* (James 1:5). There is something we can do. We must ask God to give it to us. We must seek Him for it.

The role God's Word plays in the acquisition of wisdom

One of the chief means God uses to produce wisdom in us is His Word. *"The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple"* (Psalm 19:7:b). Paul instructs us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds[1]. God uses truth in the process of sanctification. Jesus said *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth"* (John 17:17)[2]. To conform us to the image of His Son, God uses His Word. Therefore, if we want true wisdom and humility, we will spend much time and effort reading, studying and meditating on God's Word. This is part of what it means to seek God for wisdom. Since God has made it clear that He uses His Word as a means to impart true wisdom and humility, I should set my mind to learn it. The degree to which I pay attention to the Bible gives some indication of my desire to get true wisdom and humility.

Though this is true, it is important to point out that a person can be a Bible scholar and yet be a fool. A man can be a pastor of a mega church and highly respected in his community and yet be a fool. Does wisdom and

humility come merely from the acquisition of Bible knowledge? The answer is no. Many young men go to Bible college and seminary hoping to prepare themselves for "the ministry." True wisdom, a requirement for the ministry, cannot be acquired from a Bible college or seminary. Only head knowledge can be acquired there. Many people seem to think that if they acquire all sorts of head knowledge about the Bible, they will automatically become wise and possess the humility required to pastor a church or live a spiritual life. Often, the opposite happens. They acquire head knowledge and become less humble than when they started. Mere knowledge puffs up. *"Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (I Corinthians 8:1)*. There is no short cut to acquiring true knowledge and humility. There is only one source- God. No man or institution has the power to impart it. If we seek it as if it can be acquired from books or institutions, we will merely come away with head knowledge and become arrogant in the process. The world is full of arrogant pastors that are full of Bible knowledge.

To impart true wisdom and humility, God uses trials and suffering. He tests our faith. It is only during a trial that we are put in a position of proving whether we believe God or not. If we merely have head knowledge of God's truth but fail to act upon it, we delude ourselves. James said, *"Put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the **word implanted**, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:21-25).*[3] The measure of our humility and wisdom is tied directly to how much we DO the word, not how much Greek or Hebrew we know.

You may have noticed that I have been using the words wisdom and humility together as if they were almost one and the same thing. The Bible says, *"With the humble is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2)*. It is impossible to have wisdom without having humility. To the degree that a man is humble, he will be wise. Show me a proud man, and I will show you a man lacking wisdom. Many a man will say, "Except for the grace of God, go I." Yet one may say this but only believe it in his head. The humble man really, really believes that unless God keeps him from it, he will commit adultery, murder, idolatry, etc. The humble man is taught by God to place absolutely no confidence in his own ability to keep himself from sin. For some, they learn through their own failed attempts to keep themselves. As a result, it is possible for one man who has fallen to adultery to be more humble than a man who hasn't. Through his own failure, he has learned first hand the dangers of sin and his proneness to fall. I am not advocating that a man must fall into sin in order to gain humility. I would that none would ever fall to it. But some still have not learned humility from God and deep inside think that they will not fall to sins such as adultery. To this Paul says, *"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12)*. Such a man may have acquired abundant Bible knowledge and yet greatly lack humility and wisdom.

Since we are in such great need of wisdom and humility, and since we cannot generate it ourselves, let us cry out to God to make us humble and wise. Then we will shine as bright lights for Jesus. Then we will gain eternal riches that can come only from the hand of God.

[1] *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2)*

[2] *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27).*

[3] *"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." (Matthew 7:24-27).*