

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Scripture Memory</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>110</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>Ephesians 1:8-10</b>		
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### WISDOM & DISCERNMENT

Allan Bloom, in a remarkable book written a few years ago entitled *The Closing of the American Mind*, made this observation, "I do not believe that my generation, my cousins who have been educated in the American way, all of whom are M.D.s or Ph.D.s, have any comparable learning. When they talk about heaven and earth, the relations between men and women, parents and children, the human condition, I hear nothing but cliches, superficialities, the material of satire. I am not saying anything so trite as that life is fuller when people have myths to live by. I mean rather that a life based on the Book is closer to the truth, that it provides the material for deeper research in and access to the real nature of things."<sup>1</sup> What Professor Bloom says is eminently true. But there is still more, for when one's life is steeped in God's Word, and through God's grace one has been given "wisdom and understanding," one is equipped with the spiritual discernment to face whatever comes in life. "Wisdom is the knowledge which sees to the heart of things, which knows them as they really are . . . understanding [is that] which leads to right action."<sup>2</sup> Those so equipped can discern the spirit of the times and stand tall and confident. There was a time when people across the spectrum of society were far more Biblically knowledgeable than they are today. I am not talking about knowing Bible trivia (i.e., who was the oldest man in the Bible), but being familiar with the content of Scripture. When our lives are steeped in the Word of God there will be some depth of understanding that apart from the Bible we would never possess. "Your word," declared the Psalmist, "is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105), and "The entrance of your words give light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119-130). The apostle Paul is unfolding the blessings with which our blessed God has blessed His people. We looked last time at *Redemption*. Verses 1:8-10 continue this theme as well since the blessing of *wisdom* and *understanding* (spiritual discernment) flows out of the riches of God's sovereign grace that He has lavished on His people through His beloved Son, our Redeemer, Christ Jesus.

- I. **THE PRIVILEGES BESTOWED** (1:8). The *redeemed* are the recipients of the Holy Spirit (1:13). They are ones upon whom the riches of grace come. God has been pleased to make known to them things that are hidden from all others (Matthew 11:25). The elect apprehend God's revelation through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. As Calvin rightly put it, "Our senses are so feeble that we could never understand a single word that God says to us, unless we are illumined by his Holy Spirit, for carnal men cannot comprehend heavenly things."<sup>3</sup>
  - A. **Wisdom** (*sophia*). This refers to "insight" or collective intelligence. In the movie, *The Princess Bride*, the character Inigo Montoya makes the now classic statement, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." Wisdom, according to the common notion, simply refers to being informed and knowledgeable. But in Scripture it means much more than that. Listen to how the Bible describes wisdom. "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God," sings Paul (Rom. 11:33), such wisdom that even His foolishness is wiser than men (1 Cor.

1:25), and by His wisdom men are kept from knowing Him by their own wisdom (1:21). For He is *the only wise God* (Rom. 16:27), to whom alone can be ascribed *blessing and glory and wisdom* (Rev. 7:12), and by whose *manifold wisdom* (Eph. 3:10) His purposes were revealed in Jesus Christ. That means that Christ alone is *the wisdom of God* (1 Cor. 1:24) and has become to us *wisdom from God* (1:30). He is the One *in whom all the treasures of wisdom are hidden* (Col. 2:3). And so of Him also it can be sung that He is *worthy . . . to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom* (Rev. 5:12). This means that in nearly every case in the New Testament where men possess wisdom, it has come to them as a gift from God – the Father, the Son, or the Spirit. There are 23 such instances (strangely enough the same number as the instances of human wisdom condemned in our first section). It is Christ who sends wise men into the world (Mt. 23:34). When the disciples are being persecuted, it is Christ who will give them *a mouth and wisdom* (Lk. 21:15). It was because Stephen and the other deacons were filled with the Spirit that they were filled with wisdom (Acts 6:3, 10). Stephen himself emphasizes that it was God who gave Joseph his wisdom (7:10). If Paul can speak wisdom to the Corinthians, it is because it is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:6, 7). If he is a *wise master-builder* (3:10), it is only according to the grace of God given to him. If anyone wants to become wise, he must become a fool or he will not be receptive to God (3:18), and it is only through the Spirit that men are given a word of wisdom (12:8). Any wisdom that we have is what God made to abound to us (Eph. 1:8). It is He who gives us a spirit of wisdom (1:17), and who fills us *with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom* (Col. 1:9). If Paul can *teach every man in all wisdom*, it is only because Christ works in Him mightily (1:28, 29). If the Colossians are to possess wisdom, it is only when the word of Christ dwells in them richly (3:16). The Scriptures are written according to the wisdom given by God to their writers (2 Pet. 3:15), and therefore they are able to make their readers *wise unto salvation* (2 Tim. 3:15).”<sup>4</sup>

- B. **Understanding** (*phronesis*). This actually expresses the result or application of wisdom. It is wisdom in operation (cf. Colossians 3:2; Romans 9:5). It should be noted that this work of illumination by the Holy Spirit encompasses the affection, as well as the mind (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:11-16).
- II. **THE PLAN REVEALED** (1:9). This *Wisdom* and *Understanding* is specific in nature – it enables believers to grasp spiritual realities – in particular *the mystery of His will*.
- A. **Mystery** (*musterion*). This term refers to something that cannot be discovered apart from divine revelation. Christians have been given the necessary wisdom and understanding to grasp this.
  - B. **God’s Will**. Note the context. Election and redeeming grace are the central points. God has purposed and brought to pass salvation and is pleased to reveal this to the redeemed.
- III. **THE PURPOSE EFFECTED** (1:9). God’s sovereign disclosing of His will is also a part of the riches of sovereign grace. God *purposed* (*protithemi*, middle voice) for Himself. This Greek verb is only used three times in the New Testament (all by Paul). Romans 1:13 (of human purpose), Romans 3:25 (of God’s action), and Ephesians 1:9 (God’s purpose).
- A. **Disclosure**. God has “made known” (*gnōrisas*) the mystery of this will to His saints. This knowledge is not speculative and it has none of the mystic or esoteric features so prominent in ancient and new age Gnosticism. Wisely did W. G. T. Shedd write, “The first duty incumbent upon a man when he has obtained some new view of divine truth, is to *apply* it. But there is nothing that so interferes with such a personal application as pride, or self-gratulation. He who seeks to understand the doctrines of Scripture only that he may admire himself, or be admired by others because of his knowledge of Scripture, will never bring them home to himself; will

never employ them for purposes of self-improvement.”<sup>5</sup> “Grace,” says Hendriksen, “sanctifies this knowledge to the hearts of those destined to be saved.”<sup>6</sup>

B. **God’s Good Pleasure.** The thought was first introduced in 1:5. God takes special delight in making known His sovereign purpose to those redeemed by His Son.

IV. **THE PERVASIVE DESIGN (1:10).** God’s decree is eternal, but it comes to fruition in human history. What God has designed to do, He will accomplish.

A. **The Fulness of Time.** This refers to the completion of consummation of time when time merges into eternity.

B. **The Unification.** The Greek word *anakephalaioo* literally means “to sum up” (cf. Romans 13:9 where it is so translated in the NIV). Here (as in Colossians 1:20), it speaks of the final and complete restoration and reconciliation that God purposed in Christ.

**CONCLUSION:** Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his masterful treatment on Ephesians, points our attention to, “the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 8, verse 5: *They that are in the flesh do **mind** the things of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit do **mind** the things of the Spirit.* In the Greek, *mind* is the same term, and it means that *fleshly things* are the interest of *men in the flesh*; that is the realm that attracts them, that is where they live in their minds, the things of this world form their enjoyment. Or take again Colossians, chapter 3, verse 2: *Set **your affection** on things above.* Here we find the same word – *to set the affection* – as the one translated *prudence* in our text. These illustrations help us to understand the meaning of the term *prudence*. It means a state of mind which includes the affections as well as the understanding. Wisdom is a matter of the intellect and of the understanding; prudence includes the affections as well as the mind. So it can be translated by the word *insight* – *in all wisdom and insight*. It means *spiritual discernment*, the ability to discern the excellence of the things of God, and to have a corresponding affection toward them. So the riches of God’s grace have abounded toward us not only in the wisdom that gives me understanding; it takes up the whole of my soul, the whole man. It includes my affections, my interest, my love; my whole being is called out to it; and I desire it with my whole being.”<sup>7</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul’s Epistle To The Ephesians* (Macmillan, 1904), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, Bk. III. Chap. II. Section 7.

<sup>4</sup> H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of The Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied In Depth* (Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1977), p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Sermons to the Spiritual Man* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1972), p. 278.

<sup>6</sup> W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Baker, 1967), p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians One* (Baker, 1978), p. 193