

Becoming Wise by Walking with the Wise

Proverbs 13:20

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Greg L. Price

How do those who are truly wise become wise? How do they grow in the wisdom? Solomon was the wisest mere man that ever lived (none like him in wisdom before or after him, 1 Kings 3:12). Having such credentials, I would think he has something important to say about wisdom and how we can become wise (whether we are young or old). Perhaps we should listen to what he has to say (just like the best in any field—musician, artist, athlete, doctor, theologian, cook, etc.).

In this proverb Solomon gives us a most important (and very practical) aid to become wise. If we choose to make the wise our best friends, we will become like them. However, the opposite is also true. If we chose to make the foolish our best friends, we will become like them. How do we know who are our best friends? It is those with whom we spend the most time (whether face-to-face or whether in what we watch, read, or listen to). Our best friends are those who are having the most influence on our lives (in our desires, our dreams, and in the way we talk and act).

How much time (outside of our work responsibilities) do we spend with the Lord Jesus in communion with Him each day (or in watching, reading, and listening to that which will grow us in our faith and love for the Lord Jesus and His truth) in comparison to our favorite movies/programs or our favorite music that simply entertain us, but which do not draw us closer to Jesus (who is become wisdom to us, 1 Corinthians 1:30)? We don't truly want to become wise if we don't spend time with Jesus in daily worship and in communion with Him throughout the day.

Even as Christians, we may in pride consider ourselves to be wise, but if we are choosing to hang out (in our free time) with the foolish, Solomon says we are not wise (we are only fooling ourselves). Who we spend the most time with is who we most enjoy communing with and who we will become like, Solomon declares.

From our text this Lord's Day, (1) If We Walk with the Wise, We Will Be Wise (Proverbs 13:20a); (2) If We Walk with Fools, We Will Be Destroyed (Proverbs 13:20b).

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

A. What is it to be wise?

1. Wisdom (according to Scripture) is not the mere acquisition of knowledge and truth.

Wisdom is not merely cramming our heads full of knowledge so that we 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. I am not disparaging 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.

2. Wisdom is a grace (a free gift from God) in applying the knowledge of the truth to our lives and to the lives of others. For Jesus Christ is not only the truth of God who illuminates our minds as to what we are to believe, but He is also the wisdom of God who teaches us how we are to please Him in every area of our life in applying that truth (Colossians 2:3). Therefore, to be 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. For example, if we believe that God knows all and sees all, we will be wise by realizing how foolish it is to pretend as if God does not see the sins we commit in secret. To think and act as if we can deceive God is to be foolish rather than wise. For we have not applied to our lives the truth we have affirmed with our mouths.

B. How do we grow in wisdom?

1. By studying and filling our minds with the Word of God so that we know what we are to believe to be true (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2. By communing with Him who is wisdom at those appointed times of private worship, family worship, public worship, but also in our desires, thoughts, thanks, praise, and supplications throughout the day.

3. By loving wisdom and desiring it more than entertainment, more than treasures, more than friends, more than earthly success (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 true 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 time spent with the wise rather than with the foolish.

a. The wise may not be the most popular.

b. The wise may not be the most public person.

c. The wise may not have the most flashy gifts.

d. The wise will be Christians who take their faith in Christ and His doctrine seriously (no compromise), who do not pretend to be perfect or know-it-alls, who practice righteousness (and not just profess it), who want to grow in the love and truth of Jesus, and who love the Lord Jesus and their neighbor (beginning in their own family), who take what they have learned from the sermon and talk about it, pray about it, and practice it.

e. In other words, the wise that we should want to be around and learn from are not wise because of the gifts they possess, but because of the grace they possess to use what they have been given for the glory of Christ and for 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 Christ great rather than their own name great.

f. If you would be truly wise, consciously seek to spend time with those who redeem the time, talents, and treasures given to them by God, rather than wasting them or being lazy and indifferent about the commandments of God.

g. 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). They were applying the truth of God to their particular situation. Their knowledge of God was not viewed as being just for religious matters or just appropriate at church.

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

1. You need not only seek to spend time with those who are wise and presently living, but 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, and 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 Christ in the Word, Christ in the lives of the wise to whom you listen. We are not followers of men. We do not listen to men simply because they hold a place of authority in the Church. We desire to follow those who follow Christ (in good times and hard times). We desire Christ in them. We desire the wisdom of Christ in them. We follow them as they have followed Christ (not perfectly, but faithfully).

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

A. What is foolishness? What characterizes a foolish person?

1. A foolish person uses knowledge to impress others—it's about self not helping others (1 Corinthians 8:1).
2. A foolish person is willful and stubborn— he must have things his way rather than God's way. God's commandments are a burden rather than a delight.
3. A foolish person may fill the head with knowledge, but does not want to apply it in his life (the desire is not there).
4. A foolish person prefers the wisdom of the world over the wisdom of God found in Scripture (when the experts or the majority contradict God, he goes with the experts and the majority).

B. Solomon says those who are foolish, 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 they rub them the wrong way, because they are too narrow, because their way involves sacrifice rather than pleasure. 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 and right and pure and holy.

C. When Solomon speaks of the “companion” of fools, the Hebrew word for “companion” comes from a word that means to feed. Thus, companions were those in the Hebrew mind that would spend time eating with and communing with those around the same table.

1. We may spend time with unbelievers 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 the knowledge of the truth to saving faith in Christ. So we should do likewise.
2. 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 dens of iniquity to lead them to Christ, lest you be drawn into their sinful practices. Don't compromise the truth in order to establish rapport; for it is not you that saves a single soul. It is God alone that saves souls from sin. He will do so by means of the truth coming from a heart filled with love and practicing righteousness.

D. Those who choose to spend time with the foolish 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.

1. With such consequences at stake, it behooves us to weigh so carefully such questions as these. With whom do we desire to spend our time? Who do we want to be like? Who are our heroes?
2. The answer to those questions can easily be determined. How many hours in the course of the week do we spend following certain movie stars or rock singers or TV personalities or sports figures? We are communing with them in their music, in their movies, and within our thoughts and desires even if we have never personally met them.
3. Do we want to be like them because they are wise like Christ? Are we attracted to them because they are famous, beautiful, rich, smart, or because they are wise? If you would be wise, commune with those who are wise, for the companion of fools will be destroyed.

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