

(ordinarily) granted greater wisdom is the way of disaster.

Proverbs has a lot to say about rightly receiving godly rebukes (e.g., 9:7-9; 24:25; 27:5-6; 28:23). It is wisdom to hearken to the brotherly admonition of church office-bearers. How often do we become angry when rebuked or even huff like little children!

Our need for wisdom touches upon so many different areas of our lives. First, wisdom is necessary for the right use of our tongues. When we utter foolish, hurtful words behind the backs of others or on Facebook or in the church or in our families, our tongues are “set on fire of hell” and that fire can spread quickly (James 3:5-6). How difficult it is to “tame” our tongues (7-8)! “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (1:19-20).

Second, we need wisdom with regard to discipline. Proverbs 3:11-12 tells us how we must understand and receive discipline at God’s hand: “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” In the light of God’s wise and beneficial discipline of us, we discipline our children: “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (22:15).

Third, wisdom enables us rightly to work and rise from sleep. “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man” (Prov. 6:6-11).

Fourth, we need wisdom to avoid the foolishness of comparing ourselves with others: “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (II Cor. 10:12).

The book of Proverbs especially calls young men (and women) to grow in wisdom. Why? Because ordinarily they have a greater lack of wisdom than they think. Because young people must make big decisions as regards friendships, education and work, courtship and marriage, church, etc. Because often they reckon that they can make these decisions alone, especially without the advice or even approval of faithful parents.

Let us all confess our foolish sins and receive forgiveness in Christ crucified. Let us pray for wisdom: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Let us cry out for it “as silver” or “hid treasures” with all our hearts (Prov. 2:3-4).

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The Christian’s Wisdom

Fearing the Lord is the repeated definition of wisdom in the Old Testament wisdom literature: “the fear of the LORD ... is wisdom” (Job 28:28; cf. Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10). The great reality is Jehovah, the Creator, Lord, Saviour and Judge who is revealed in sacred Scripture. We must adapt all of our thinking and behaviour so that it is in accordance with Him. He must be the end and goal of our existence!

Let us consider how this applies to the Christian home. God sees and judges all that goes on. Therefore, we must fear Him and change our ways where necessary. The husband is the head of the house, who must rule in the love of Christ and according to God’s Word. Thus there must be no bullying or lording! The wife is to submit to her husband in the Lord, without manipulating him to get her own way. Covenant children must honour their parents and obey them in the Lord, without answering back. James 3:17 describes “the wisdom that is from above,” which must be exercised in our homes and elsewhere, as being “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

What is it to be wise on the Lord’s day? It is to adapt all things in the light of the reality of Christ’s resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week. It is our wisdom to keep God’s law out of gratitude (Deut. 4:6), including the fourth commandment. We must come to both the services of a faithful church, as those who are prepared spiritually to hear and obey God’s Word. We train our children to do this in wisdom too! We must be wise, building our Lord’s days upon the rock of Christ’s words and not upon the sand of worldly pleasures (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). For example, the believer does not book flights that schedule him to be in an airport or flying on the first day of the week.

Proverbs speaks of three major ways of identifying a fool. First, he caves in to peer pressure (e.g., 1:10-19; 2:12-15; 4:14-17). This involves getting in with a “bad crowd” and joining them in their sin. This is not adapting oneself to God and His Word (wisdom); this is adapting oneself to ungodly people and ways (folly).

Second, he is seduced by women (e.g., 2:16-19; 5:3-23; 6:23-35; 7:4-27; 9:13-18). Going the way of fornication and adultery leads to everlasting hell. Likewise, there are silly women who are deceived by lustful men who tell them what they want to hear, namely, that they are beautiful and wonderful, merely in order to get them into bed.

Third, he does not listen to (godly) parents. Frequently God addresses us in Proverbs as “My son” (or daughter) and commands us to “hear” Him (1:8) or something similar (e.g., 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:20; 5:1). Our earthly fathers and mothers speak to us after the same fashion. Not heeding those who love us dearly and those to whom God has

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The Salt of the Earth

A reader asks about Matthew 5:13: “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

The most common view is that the salt refers to Christians who bring about the day in which all believe in the Lord Jesus so that the kingdom of God is established here on earth. One way to do this is to Christianize all the institutions of life (the home, the church, the schools, the state, the work place and marriage). This is the postmillennial interpretation of the text. If God’s people do what they can to make this world Christian, they will bring about the kingdom of heaven here in this world.

It is, of course, a ridiculous idea that we can bring about the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. As one man said to my grandson who was applying for studies in a Christian college, “I am building the kingdom with my chain saw.” He probably meant that he was using his chain saw to rebuild houses destroyed by a hurricane.

Jesus smashes that interpretation with His statement that the kingdom of heaven comes not with observation, for the kingdom is within God’s people (Luke 17:20-21).

I have no interest in an earthly kingdom for in such a kingdom its citizens are still sinners, including me. I want and need and look forward to a kingdom where I will be forever beyond and free from sin to worship the Lord. This is a spiritual kingdom which will come only “within” me, worked by the Holy Spirit who applies to all the elect the blessings of the cross of Jesus Christ. A chain saw or any other earthly tool will not build the kingdom of heaven, no matter how well it is wielded.

Salt is necessary for animals and human beings to live and function properly. That is why huge tribes of barbarians at the beginning of the medieval period would travel long distances for salt. That is not the idea of Matthew 5:13, however, for it speaks of “the salt *of the earth*.”

Looking elsewhere for the meaning, we note that for many ages salt has been used to *preserve* many things, chiefly meat, especially before refrigeration. While salt is not intended to preserve meat for a long period of time, it worked well for a while.

Jesus calls His elect people “the salt of the earth” near the start of His Sermon on the Mount and immediately after the beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), which define the nature of the true citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The citizens of Christ’s kingdom are not characterized by building houses with chain saws; they are defined as those who are poor, meek, spiritually hungry and thirsty, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted. These are strange characteristics of citizens of an earthly kingdom but they perfectly fit these citizens because the kingdom of God is spiritual.

Jesus goes on to say that, because the citizens of the kingdom of heaven possess these characteristics, they are able to be the salt of the earth. Their presence on the earth is the only reason why the world continues to exist. If it were not for the presence in God’s creation of these elect citizens of the kingdom of heaven, the world would be destroyed.

Salt preserves things and so the citizens of the kingdom of heaven are essential for the preservation of this present creation until all the elect are saved.

Remember, first, that God’s elect are not a mob from which some may be taken or some added without doing any damage to the whole. God’s people are the body of Christ (I Cor. 12), an organic whole in which each member is necessary for the whole and has his or her individual place, a place different from that of every other saint.

Second, each elect member is preserved and cannot be lost (John 10:28-30). The world has to last until the last elect is born and brought to faith in Christ.

Third, the world and every creature is formed by God for the salvation of His elect. That is why Holy Writ can say that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Reprobation is necessary for election and manifests the strict justice of God.

Remember when God told Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? Abraham knew that righteous Lot lived in Sodom and he wondered whether a just man would also be destroyed with the wicked. Fearful of calling into question the purposes of the mighty God, Abraham asked indirectly for Lot’s salvation, pleading for the sparing of the cities. God assured Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom even if there were only ten righteous people there (Gen. 18:17-33).

II Peter 3:9 is another such passage, though it is often twisted in support of the heresy of an ineffectual divine desire to save the reprobate. The church of Peter’s day was being persecuted. Because the Lord did not return immediately to save His church, His promised second coming seemed to have failed. Peter reminds the saints that God is not slow in fulfilling His promise but rather that all the elect must be saved before Christ can come again. If Jesus had returned when the saints wanted Him to come, we would never have been saved! But God is longsuffering toward *us*, and Christ will not come until all the elect are born and brought to saving faith. Are absolutely all men the objects of the divine longsuffering? No! God’s longsuffering *saves* (II Pet. 3:15)!

Finally, we ourselves also wonder why heaven does not burst open so that the holy wrath of God drives the wicked into hell. The world is full of people who ignore Him, deny Him and blaspheme His name with terrible curses. They openly deride the Scriptures and walk in the most horrible sins, often while working to make these sins enshrined in civil law. About 125,000 unborn babies are murdered every day in our world; homosexuality is openly practised before the very face of God. Our world not only does these things but it takes pleasure in those that do them (Rom. 1:32). Wickedness is made legal so that to call these things sin may be opening oneself to punishment by the state.

To sum it all up, God loves His elect and gave Christ for them only. He cannot destroy all the wicked until the last elect is saved. Somewhere in our corrupt world is the God-fearing couple from whom that last elect will be born.

When persecution comes and God’s people are hard-pressed by the hatred of the wicked, and we wonder why Christ does not come to rescue them, let us remember that He will come but that the whole church must be born and born again first. *Prof. Hanko*