

## What is Wisdom? ©Richard L. Smith PhD

To be wise is to know what really matters (among foolish alternatives) and to act (or behave) accordingly. What matters is not just a question of facts. The knowledge we need to be wise is about meaning. Wisdom is about having a correct perspective. To gain wisdom we should ask: What is valuable? What has purpose? And, how should we apply or use it?

This is why there is a close connection between wisdom and ethics. We do not normally think of a person as wise unless they *act* wisely. To act wisely is to behave righteously based on true understanding. Wisdom, therefore, is, both insight *and* application. The pursuit of godly wisdom implies a desire to *be* good and *do* good.

This is why biblical wisdom is less concerned with metaphysical speculation than with insight about how to make good decisions in dealing with God and people. The wise men of Israel found insight in meditation upon God's word and creation. The Bible's wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) imparts knowledge concerning how to live life and how to deal with some of its more difficult aspects (such as suffering and doubt). As a result, the wisdom literature does not impart simply a knowledge of facts, but also skill in living based on what is most important within the biblical worldview.

There is also a difference between intelligence and wisdom. An intelligent person may know a lot of facts, but that does not make them wise. Wisdom depends on accurate information that produces real knowledge. And, hopefully, this knowledge leads to understanding that results in wisdom. Biblical wisdom is discernment about the best way to live life before God.

Proverbs 3:13-18 describes the great value of wisdom and understanding:

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.

Verses 19-20 show that God, himself, is supremely wise as our creator: "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew."

In the Old Testament 1 Chronicles 12:32 provides an excellent human example of wisdom: "Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do ... " The men of Issachar discerned what was important for their moment in history, an "understanding of the times," and what they must do as a result -- support the new king, David.

The New Testament provides another clear illustration: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Christian disciples, who really understand God's great love, know the imperative to love others in imitation of Christ's love for us.

So, how can we gain wisdom? First, we should become students and learn *everything we can* from the Bible. We must gain knowledge and understanding. Second, we should pray. Ask God

for discernment about what *really* matters in his kingdom in your context. Ask him how to apply those insights at every given moment and in every situation for the glory of God and the blessing of others. *This* is wisdom.