

THE ABC'S OF GODLY WISDOM

Introduction

A young man got into a financial tangle by loaning a friend in another town \$500 without the benefit of securing from the man a written statement that he had, indeed, borrowed the money and was obligated to repay it. When the young man needed his money, he realized that he had nothing to document his claim. In desperation, he consulted his father for advice.

After a moment of consideration, his father said, "This is what you should do. Write him a note and tell him that you need the \$1000 that you loaned him."

The young man corrected his father, "It was \$500, Dad."

"Yes, I know," replied his father, "but if you write that he owes you \$1000, he will immediately write back, stating that he only owes you \$500. Then you will have it in writing." (*Our Daily Bread*, 9/25/92)

This is a good example of what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, "*The sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of light*" (Lk. 16:8.) On another occasion, the Lord exhorted His disciples to be "*wise as serpents, but innocent as doves*" (Matt. 10:16.)

As Christians, we need to be wise, not with the cleverness of the world, but with the wisdom of God. Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs focuses our attention on The ABC's of Godly Wisdom.

I. The Characteristics of Godly Wisdom

(Prov. 10:5; Prov. 28:7; Prov. 10:19; Prov. 29:11; Prov. 12:15; Prov. 14:16)

A WISE MAN UNDERSTANDS GOD'S DESIGN FOR LIFE.

He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest season is a disgraceful son. (Prov. 10:5)

Proverbs 10:3a gives the assurance that the LORD will provide for His people; though they may be subjected to difficult times, the LORD will prove Himself faithful to provide for their needs: "*Jehovah will not allow the righteous to be famished.*"

Proverbs 10:4 balances the previous proverb. Although the LORD is faithful to provide for His people, they must not abuse that truth by becoming negligent; the LORD will not honor such abuse of His commitment: "*He who does his work negligently will become poor, but diligent labor produces wealth.*"

Proverbs 10:5 teaches that a wise man understands God's design for life. The wise man will neither misinterpret nor abuse the LORD's faithfulness. He will rely upon God's faithfulness and be faithful to fulfill his God-given responsibilities.

A WISE MAN EXERCISES SELF-CONTROL OVER HIS LIFE.

Whoever keeps the law is a wise son, but whoever is a companion with gluttons brings disgrace upon his father. (Prov. 28:7)

This proverb emphasizes that a wise man exercises self-control over his appetites; note 1 Corinthians 6:12, *"Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything."* Such is the Apostle Paul's teaching concerning Christian liberty.

In the multitude of words there is no lack of transgression, but whoever refrains from speaking acts wisely. (Prov. 10:19)

This proverb emphasizes that a wise man exercises self-control over his tongue. He understands the value of keeping silent, as Proverbs 10:14 indicates, *"Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of the fool invites ruin."*

He also understands the value of wholesome speech well spoken: *"The tongue of the wise utters knowledge in a beneficial way, but the mouth of the fool pours out folly"* (Prov. 15:2.)

A fool expresses all his anger, but a wise man holds it back and calms himself. (Prov. 29:11)

This proverb emphasizes that a wise man exercises self-control over his temper; compare Proverbs 19:11, *"A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."*

A WISE MAN APPRECIATES THE VALUE OF COUNSEL.

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. (Prov. 12:15)

Note what the Apostle James has to say about wisdom:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. (Jam. 3:13;) one characteristic of wisdom is humility, or, meekness; that is, displaying patience and submissiveness, and showing a teachable spirit.

... the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. (Jam. 3:17;) godly wisdom is compliant, it is open to reason and willing to be convinced of viable alternatives, it is not insistent on its own way.

In contrast to Proverbs 12:15, consider Proverbs 18:1, *“He who separates himself is devoted to his own desire, and he rages against all sound wisdom.”* This proverb speaks of a man who separates himself from the counsel and company of his friends. It further describes him as becoming infatuated or even obsessed with a *“desire;”* that is to say, some idea, or plan, or ambition has taken hold of him and has even become an obsession with him. The proverb literally says, *“Separating himself, he devotes himself to a desire.”* He is further described as *“raging against all sound wisdom.”* He has become so obsessed with this particular idea that he has become unreasonable and even irrational; such is not the characteristic of a wise man—it is the opposite of the behavior of a wise man.

A WISE MAN EXHIBITS A HOLY FEAR OF GOD.

A wise man fears and turns away from evil, but the fool behaves arrogantly and is confident. (Prov. 14:16)

True godly fear is not merely an emotion, it is a stimulus that moves a man to godly action; consider Hebrews 11:7,

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark by which his family was saved. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (Heb. 11:7)

In contrast, the fool allows himself to go beyond the proper moral limits, being *“confident”* that no harm will come to his soul. There is a holy boldness that trusts God and says, “Even though I may be afraid, I will trust in the LORD and do what He says and go where He leads.” There is also an unholy boldness that tests God and says, “I will expose myself to evil and indulge in evil, trusting God to deliver me and preserve me.”

II. The Benefits of Godly Wisdom (Proverbs 10:1; Proverbs 15:24; Proverbs 29:8; Proverbs 13:14)

WISDOM IS A MEANS OF HONORING YOUR PARENTS.

A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother. (Prov. 10:1)

This is the very first of the proverbs and it presents a theme that is repeated throughout the Book of Proverbs.

Note the godly father's great desire for his son as expressed in Proverbs 4:7, *"Wisdom is the primary thing; therefore, get wisdom. Indeed, give all that you have acquired in order to acquire understanding."* Wisdom is the ability to think and act in a way that is pleasing to God by observing the counsel and commandments contained in His Word.

Consider the godly father's greatest joy as expressed by the apostle John: *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth"* (3 Jn. 4.)

WISDOM IS A MEANS OF PROMOTING SPIRITUAL LIFE AND HEALTH.

For the wise, the pathway of life leads upward, so that he may avoid Sheol below. (Prov. 15:24)

The possession and practice of biblical wisdom results in a life that is morally and spiritually close to God: *"the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until the full light of day. ¹⁹The way of the wicked is like darkness; they cannot see the things over which they stumble"* (Prov. 4:18-19.)

WISDOM IS A MEANS OF INFLUENCING OTHERS FOR GOOD.

Scoffers set a city on fire, but wise men turn away wrath. (Prov. 29:8)

Scoffers are those who have no reverence for God and His law, they arrogantly set themselves in opposition to God. Scripture defines the scoffer as one who refuses to receive rebuke or correction: *"A wise son accepts his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not pay attention to a rebuke"* (Prov. 13:1.) Scripture also describes the scoffer as one who seats himself in the judgment seat: *"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers"* (Psl. 1:1.) Sitting *"in the seat of scoffers"* appears to be a reference to the judgment seat, assuming God's position as Judge.

The scoffer assumes the position of God (making himself the judge and standard for judgment) and from that position he cynically and mockingly rejects all that comes from God, note 2 Peter 3:3-4,

You may be sure that in the last days scoffers will come, expressing their scoffing, and living for their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is the fulfillment of the promise that he will come? From the time the fathers fell asleep [in death] everything goes on as it has since the beginning of the creation." (2 Pet. 3:3-4)

Furthermore, the scoffer falsely assumes that he himself is immune to the judgment of God, note Isaiah 28:14-15a,

... you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. ¹⁵... you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and we have made a pact with Sheol; when the overwhelming scourge passes through the land it shall not reach us" (Isaiah 28:14-15a;) the scoffers wrongly assume that they are immune to the LORD's righteous judgment, which is described here as a torrential flood sweeping through the land.

When scoffers exert their influence they cause others to forsake their reverence for God and His law; consequently, the people pursue a course of life that will have an inevitable encounter with judgment. But wise men who fear God and honor His commandments serve as a guide and influence that leads in the opposite direction—away from wrath to blessing.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, intended to turn a man away from the snares of death. (Prov. 13:14)

Every temptation is an alluring, demonically contrived trap designed to destroy the life and soul of the all-too-willing victim. But a wise man, because of his acquaintance with the ways of God, is able to remove "the underbrush" and expose the hidden trap. The teaching of the wise may serve to broaden our perspective beyond the immediate to the long range, taking into account eternity itself. The teaching of the wise may serve to deepen our perspective beyond mere actions to take into account attitudes and motives and desires as well, consider Matthew 5:27-28, *"You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* Here the Lord Jesus is revealing to us the depths of God's holy law.

III. The Attainment of Godly Wisdom (Proverbs 14:33; Proverbs 13:20; Proverbs 15:33)

WISDOM IS ATTAINED BY THOSE WHO HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING HEART.

Wisdom rests in the heart of the man who has understanding; but that which resides in the heart of fools will be made known. (Prov. 14:33)

Like a bird seeking a friendly environment in which to build her nest, so wisdom makes its dwelling place in the heart of the man who possesses understanding. The Hebrew word translated "*understanding*" (בִּינָה) means "to discern," "to mark," "to pay attention;" i.e., here is a man who appreciates wisdom's value, a man who seeks wisdom and welcomes it.

Note Proverbs 10:23, *“To the fool, practicing wickedness is like a sport; likewise, so is wisdom to a man of understanding.”* Just as the fool finds it to be a source of entertainment to practice wickedness, so a man of understanding finds it to be pleasurable to meditate upon wisdom and seek to understand it.

May the prayer of Solomon also be our prayer, *“Give your servant a discerning heart ... so that I may distinguish between good and evil”* (1 Kgs. 3:9.)

WISDOM IS ATTAINED BY THOSE WHO VALUE GOOD ASSOCIATIONS.

Walk with wise men and you will become wise, but whoever is a companion with fools shall suffer for it. (Prov. 13:20)

The counsel of Proverbs 13:20a is to *“walk with wise men.”* This itself is a wise thing to do, and it is a means of making you wise, for you will be associating yourself with those who are wise and learning from their speech and conduct.

Where do you find wise men, how do you recognize them? First and foremost, spend time in the Scriptures with the Lord Jesus Christ, the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom are hidden. Then, also, spend time with wise and notable Christian men by reading their works. Furthermore, ask the LORD to provide you with wise Christian friends and counselors.

WISDOM IS ATTAINED BY THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD.

The fear of Jehovah teaches a man wisdom, and before honor comes humility. (Prov. 15:33)

“The fear of Jehovah,” this is what leads to wisdom; it is the starting point and first principle of godly wisdom. Furthermore, to fear Jehovah is the instruction given by wisdom, it is the summary of wise conduct and attitude.

Why is this the case? It is so because the fear of the LORD causes us to listen to and to heed what He commands, and thereby causes us to walk in the way of life and of blessing and of the knowledge of the LORD.

Conclusion

Here, then, are the ABC's of godly wisdom as they are presented to us in the Book of Proverbs. May the LORD impart to us the grace to appreciate the value of godly wisdom, to seek after it, to grow in it and to ever apply it to our lives.